

CHRONIC SHAME IN PASTORAL THEOLOGY

An American Protestant Reformed Perspective

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## Abstract

In the last decade shame has emerged as a problem of growing proportions in the United States, primarily in the field of psychoanalysis. Much of the attention has been focused on shame of a chronic nature, analyzed from the standpoint of self psychology. Fewer contributions, however, have been made by pastoral theologians in considering chronic shame within Christian tradition.

The impetus for this research, therefore, is to advance pastoral-theological perspectives on shame. Toward this end, in-depth interviews were undertaken with parishioners in two Presbyterian churches in the United States. These interviews comprise the primary source of original and creative insights for this research.

The findings can be divided into two primary realms. The first realm consists in the variety of phenomena constituting chronic shame. Guided by an emphasis in "grounded theory" research on determining relationships between various phenomena, interviewees' chronic shame is analyzed according to a sequence of causes, preventive strategies and consequences. Two important causes of chronic shame for interviewees appear to be failure and rejection. A peculiar feature of these causes is that shame is felt for failing demands interviewees believe they had exaggerated in their own minds. Moreover, shame is felt for rejection interviewees are not certain even occurred. A primary strategy interviewees employ to prevent shame is maintaining certain views of identity, and a second strategy consists in protecting against shame's pain. Finally, consequences of these strategies, and of shame itself, include self-estrangement, anxiety and withdrawal.



The second realm of findings is to explore the roles both of social structures (particularly the church) and apparent psychic structures in creating chronic shame. Notably, while interviewees were taken in equal numbers both from a conservative and a liberal church, the majority of chronic shame sufferers came from the conservative church, leading the analysis of social contexts with respect to the church to focus on the conservative Reformed tradition. Moreover, as for the peculiar roles of psychic and social structures in chronic shame, norms from interviewees' conservative Reformed tradition appear to supply demands which are increased to demands of perfection by apparent psychic structures, resulting in frequent failures and chronic shame. Moreover, these demands of perfection appear to serve not only as causes of shame, but as the source of the certain views of identity which interviewees seek to maintain in order to prevent shame.

Norms from interviewees' conservative Reformed setting which are found to be involved in creating their chronic shame are a variety of expressions of Christian piety, including values placed on biblical knowledge, prayer, and roles for women. Additionally, chronic shame is found to shape interviewees' views of God and of sin. These and other findings are used to reconsider existing self-help pastoral theological approaches for chronic shame. Moreover, the findings are considered within a pastoral counseling model believed to be compatible with the conservative Reformed tradition of the majority of interviewees who are chronic shame sufferers.

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that it is my own work.

Nelson E. Ould

May 12, 1995

To  
THE GLORY  
OF GOD

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## Preface

This is the second thesis written using the empirical data gathered during this research. This second thesis is regarded to be substantially different from the first. As a result, a word of explanation regarding the path taken from the first thesis to the second may prove helpful.

The first thesis analyzed the empirical data according to chapter headings of "moral shame," "chronic psychological shame" and "social process -- people and situations impacting shame." These categories were an attempt to arrange interviewees' stories about shame in a meaningful way, and this arrangement had some merit. However, after re-analyzing the data, this second thesis focuses on just chronic shame experiences, discussed in the first thesis as "chronic psychological shame." In this present thesis, these shame experiences are analyzed from the standpoint of causes, preventive strategies and consequences of chronic shame.

I determined that focusing on chronic shame would strengthen this thesis, for several reasons. First, chronic shame experiences were the richest component of the interview data. Interviewees who described or demonstrated chronic bouts with shame had much pertinent information to share. By comparison, the data previously characterized as moral shame and as social process impacting shame seemed less inspiring. Nevertheless, this format will also allow for the inclusion of one of the richer portions of non-chronic shame data, in the form of a comparison with chronic guilt.

Second, chronic shame is the shame of most interest to myself, and to psychologists and pastoral counselors presently writing on shame. Looking back on it now,

experiences of enduring or repeated shame were of most interest to me at the start of this research, mainly because they touched my own experience of shame. However, in an effort not to constrain the empirical enquiry by my own experience, I sought to focus broadly on all experiences of shame among churchpeople, in particular those experienced as sin. This concern was sustained in the writing of the first thesis, accounting for the wider spectrum of shame, namely, moral, chronic psychological and social shame.

However, focusing primarily on experiences of chronic shame enables this thesis to engage more closely with psychoanalytic and pastoral literature, leading to relevant advances in knowledge. Lastly, it should also be said that my own experience of enduring and repeated shame may have led me to unintentionally 'find' interviewees suffering similarly from shame. To the extent that this occurred, then focusing on the experiences of chronic shame sufferers capitalizes on a possible bias of the research process. Notwithstanding this possible bias, the focus on chronic shame represents an analytical decision based on interviewees' descriptions and meanings.

## Introduction

In February of 1992, the *Atlantic Monthly* ran as its lead article a story on shame, calling shame the "preeminent cause of emotional distress in our time."<sup>1</sup> While some may rightly be wary of this bold claim, shame has nevertheless gained growing prominence in the United States in the last decade as a leading concern for psychoanalysts and for writers in the self-help movement.

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to this dialogue already underway on shame in contemporary America. However, while most of the current dialogue is in the field of psychoanalysis, this thesis aims to make its contribution in the field of pastoral theology. The primary way this aim is sought to be accomplished is by considering shame experiences of parishioners within the context of their church traditions. Interviewees' shame experiences will also be analyzed in relation to ongoing discussions in the social sciences.

Perhaps "dialogue" forms an appropriate theme for the thesis as a whole. In Chapter One, we seek to engage with dialogue already underway in the social sciences and in pastoral theology. By far the bulk of recent writings are in psychoanalysis, where shame is studied from the standpoint of narcissism and psychologies of the self. As mentioned in the Preface to this research, psychoanalysts' primary interest is chronic shame, a focus which this thesis will also maintain. Moreover, because psychoanalytic perspectives have dominated recent writings, it would appear that considering chronic shame experiences within their social contexts, particularly the church, holds the potential for fruitful research.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Karen, "Shame," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 269, no. 2 (February, 1992), p. 40.

In Chapter Two we turn to a consideration of the research method. The research method is a "grounded theory" approach to qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews with parishioners from both a liberal and a conservative Presbyterian church. In this way, the thesis moves from a dialogue with relevant literature to a dialogue with churchpeople (through the interviews) to gain an empirically grounded perspective on chronic shame.

In Chapters Three - Five, we return to interviewees' dialogue (in the absence of interviewees themselves), this time to dialogue not only with interviewees' testimony, but again with relevant literature. Because the majority of the interviewees suffering from chronic shame attended the conservative church, the research findings lead the thesis in particular to consider chronic shame in the context of the conservative Reformed tradition.

In Chapter Three we seek to describe and analyze causes of shame, and shame itself. Two important causes of shame revealed by interviewees were failure and rejection, experienced in various dimensions of distortion and uncertainty. That is, some interviewees appeared to experience shame for failing demands which they sensed they had exaggerated in their own minds in some way. Moreover, they experienced shame for rejection they were not certain had even occurred. Concerning the peculiar roles of social and psychic factors in creating chronic shame, (social) demands from interviewees' church and larger societal settings appeared to be increased by (psychic) demands of perfection, giving rise to frequent failure, and chronic shame. Specific demands interviewees experienced included expectations of Christian commitment and expectations felt in one interviewees' various roles as a woman.

In Chapter Four, we will seek to describe and analyze two important preventive strategies against shame. The two

strategies are protecting against shame's pain, and especially maintaining certain views of identity. Concerning a strategy of maintaining views of identity, we will consider both the process of maintaining those views, and the identities themselves. Concerning the identities themselves, we will focus on identities which appeared to cluster around notions of Christian piety and also identities which interviewees' seemed to see reflected in their verbal expressions. As in Chapter Three, we will consider the role of apparent psychic and social structures in leading to interviewees' preventive strategies.

In Chapter Five chapter, we seek to describe and analyze the consequences of interviewees' preventive strategies, and the consequences of shame itself. Two primary consequences described by interviewees were self-estrangement and anxiety. First, self-estrangement appeared to manifest itself as lost identity and as estranged feelings and desires. Accordingly, we will also consider interviewees' strategies for reconciliation, including ways that Scripture and experiences of a loving God aided this process. Second, anxiety appeared to manifest itself as a consequence of failing to hold onto certain views of identity. Additionally, in response to resulting shame, interviewees appeared to turn to an additional preventive strategy against shame, namely withdrawal from view.

Finally, in Chapter Six, we consider how the findings from Chapters Three - Five not only inform the ongoing dialogue in the social sciences and pastoral theology reviewed in Chapter One, but how they reveal issues to be considered in pastoral counseling dialogue with counselees suffering from chronic shame. In particular, we will consider a Christian counseling model thought to supply a relevant response within the context of interviewees' own conservative church tradition. Emerging from empirical findings, this



counseling model maintains a primary counseling aim of encounters with grace. Moreover, we consider specific issues regarding the use of the Bible and prayer in chronic shame counseling, along with the apparent effects of shame on interviewees' views of God and of sin.

Although the two churches from which interviewees are drawn will be described in more detail in Chapter Two it may be useful to say a further word early on about the use of the terms "Reformed" and "conservative." Noted American church historian George Marsden writes of three branches of Reformed Christianity in America, namely doctrinalism (aimed at living out biblical doctrine), pietism (aimed at 'Christianizing' America), and culturalism (aimed at social action). Marsden goes on to identify Reformed evangelicals in America today with the pietistic strand, characterized by their adherence to "a certain style of emphasis on evangelism, personal devotions, Methodist mores, and openness in expressing one's evangelical commitment."<sup>2</sup>

According to Marsden's definitions, the liberal church from which interviewees were drawn (a church we will call "Uptown Presbyterian Church") would appear to fit comfortably in the culturalist strand. However, while not opposed to the pietist strand, the conservative church (which we will call "Fringes Presbyterian Church"), in staunchly defending the Westminster Confession of Faith as its one doctrinal statement, probably identifies more strongly with the doctrinalist tradition. Because it is not only a conservative evangelical church, but one which stands in a conservative Presbyterian denomination, Fringes Presbyterian Church would appear to be to the right of the

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<sup>2</sup>George Marsden, "Reformed and American," in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 1-3.



broader evangelical movement, especially with respect to its orthodox biblical emphasis.<sup>3</sup>

According to qualitative research principles, the findings in this research do not purport to speak for all evangelicals, all Reformed Christians, or all Reformed evangelicals. However, the preceding comments may help locate the two churches from which interviewees are drawn in their respective (and shared) traditions. Moreover, this discussion seeks to recognize that when references are made in this thesis to "the Reformed tradition" or "conservative churches" that these categories represent diverse expressions of faith.

It will be useful to note in the "Background to the Research" section in Chapter One my personal motivations in pursuing this research in shame. It may be worth mentioning here also that my own church tradition is the conservative Reformed tradition, a bias which emerges not only in my selection of two Presbyterian churches for study, but perhaps in other ways as well. Additionally, having received most of my pastoral theological training under the influence of American writers, my bias in the field is toward pastoral counseling models, rather than group or community models for care, although these models are of increasing interest to me.

As a final note, when the words 'shame' and 'guilt' are used, they are used to designate feelings, rather than objective states, unless otherwise qualified. Guilt, in particular, is a word readily associated with an objective

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<sup>3</sup>Marsden writes elsewhere that evangelicalism can be understood in terms of a group of people who hold similar Christian doctrinal beliefs, or a self-conscious religious movement (in America and elsewhere). Again, by this definition also, Fringes Presbyterian Church would probably identify more readily with the group defined according to doctrinal beliefs. George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993), pp. 1-6.

state as opposed to a subjective feeling; however, in this thesis guilt, as well as shame, is understood in its subjective sense.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Background to the Research and Literature Review

#### **Background to the Research**

The impetus for this research was both personal and professional. While I do not believe pastors can helpfully separate these two dimensions in their development and ministry, it nevertheless emphasizes the scope of this research. To explain, prior to this research, I came to believe that I suffered from shame on an enduring basis. This belief developed during the self-awareness and pastoral identity work of two basic units of Clinical Pastoral Education (C.P.E.) undertaken in America. Through the guidance of my C.P.E. supervisor, I began to see the considerable shame dynamics in my life, and after C.P.E. ended, I sought to overcome this propensity for shame through counseling. While I considered the insights I gained in counseling to be vital in my life, several areas of discontent also emerged.

First, while my counselor was serving in hospital and parish ministry, and I myself was training for the ordained ministry, neither of us seemed able to bring Christian theology to bear upon my shame struggles. Although we did pray, the bulk of the language, theoretical frameworks and solutions to my shame were sought in the secular psychotherapeutic realm. As an evangelical Christian, and as a future pastor, I felt alienated from my tradition (and from God also) during counseling, and I wondered how God and my tradition might have played a part in counseling. Looking back on it now, as an evangelical Christian from the Reformed tradition who had come to know God through the Scriptures, I think it had much to do with language, namely

the absence of biblical language and language of God. (We will return to more carefully consider this issue of language in Chapter Six.)

Second, my struggles with shame did not improve much. While I did (and still do) value immensely the insights I received from my counselor, including the many psychological descriptions which time and again 'rang true' with my inner world, I found more help in identifying problems than finding lasting solutions. That is, I sensed that psychological theory had limitations in speaking to the problem of shame. Moreover, I sensed that some psychological conceptions of the problem, were at odds with Christian faith, requiring re-evaluation in light of Christian tradition.

My unease with the dominance of psychology and with the apparent lack of theologically informed theory on shame grew when several years later I served as a counselor at a church-affiliated agency. While I was able to help people with attitude clarification and emotional release and while I was able to serve as an empathetic listener (in some cases, including issues of shame), again, I wondered how God fit into counseling.

I later came to see that the dominance of psychological theory in pastoral theology is a concern many pastoral counselors have shared in recent decades. Alastair Campbell, for example, has written about the "contemporary sense of confusion about the true nature of Christian caring (and the) feeling of alienation from traditional understandings of the pastoral task." He goes on to suggest that this has been "caused by the extraordinary successes of the 'sciences of man' -- in particular psychology and sociology -- in shedding light on the causes of human distress and the nature of helping relationships." In response Campbell calls for a "rediscovery of pastoral

care" through a re-connecting with the Christian tradition of care.<sup>1</sup>

The impetus for this research, therefore, was a desire to see advancing pastoral-theological perspectives on shame. Before turning to the particular approach to be employed in pursuing this aim, however, we turn to a review of existing literature on shame.

## **Introduction to the Literature Review**

Pastoral-theological perspectives on shame have been heavily influenced by shame theory from the social sciences. For this reason, our literature review will consider shame studies in psychoanalysis and sociology, before taking up shame studies in pastoral theology.

The bulk of recent writings on shame in the social sciences has come from psychoanalysts. Among psychoanalytic contributions, we will consider criteria for distinguishing shame from guilt, and important advances in understanding shame phenomena and their origins. While acknowledging a variety of shame types, the focus of psychoanalytical study has been chronic experiences of shame, seen to emerge from ill-formed psychic structures. In particular, modern experiences of shame in the United States have been observed to have a high content of reference to the self, rather than reference to other people and society. We will consider how self psychologists have explained this development in terms of self fragmentation and narcissism, and how sociologists have explained this development in terms of the changing nature of social sanctions and authorities giving rise to shame.

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<sup>1</sup>Alastair V. Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care*, 2nd ed. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986 (1st ed. 1981), p. 1.

Turning to recent contributions of pastoral theologians, we will consider Donald Capps' reformulation of sin within the context of shame theory, and John Patton's discussion of shame as a barrier to one's ability to forgive. Moreover, we will consider pastoral responses to the problem of chronic shame, primarily Capps' theory of self-care and Lewis Smedes' theory of finding accepting grace.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter is divided into three sections, namely, shame in psychoanalysis, shame in sociology and shame in pastoral theology.

## **I. Shame in Psychoanalysis**

Although his theory has little direct influence on shame studies today, Freud's conception of shame as a defense against exhibitionist drives is the beginning point for our study of shame in psychoanalysis. Continuing to trace developments from an historical perspective, we will move on to consider the contributions of Erik Erikson, Helen M. Lynd and Helen B. Lewis in distinguishing shame from guilt. Moreover, we will take up crucial developments in the early 1970's, particularly Heinz Kohut's theory of self psychology shame, which represented a break from Freudian drive psychology.

From there we will consider present-day issues related to the expanding varieties of shame phenomena and defenses against those phenomena. Donald Nathanson's attempt to develop a comprehensive picture of shame phenomena and Leon

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<sup>2</sup>Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 71-100, 147-169; Lewis Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, Zondervan Publishing House, Divisions of HarperCollinsPublishers, 1993), p. 108; John Patton, *Is Human Forgiveness Possible?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

Wurmser and Gershen Kaufman's important work on the nature of defense in relation to shame, will be among key focuses for this discussion. Additionally, we will consider psychotherapeutic responses to chronic shame, focused mainly on Kohut's theory of restoring self structures, and Kaufman's theory of restoring one's past "interpersonal bridges."

#### **A. Freudian Beginnings -- Shame as a Reaction Formation**

Sigmund Freud found guilt more central to his work than shame. This is not surprising in a psychological scheme in which drives, not affects, are the primary concern. To Freud, guilt was a tension arising with the ego-ideal, part of the super-ego construct. In *The Ego and the Id* (1942) Freud wrote, "The tension between the demands of conscience and the actual attainments of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt."<sup>3</sup> For Freud, the conscience is the functioning arm of the ego ideal, the construct composed of the sum of one's many identifications with the father's expectations. These expectations grow out of the resolution of the Oedipus complex, an event to which the ego ideal owes its existence. Also, in explaining the development of the ego-ideal, Freud alludes to an unconscious (in addition to a conscious) sense of guilt:

The super-ego.... represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices [i.e., early object-choices of the id]. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: "You ought to be such and such (like your father)"; it also comprises the prohibition: "You must not be such and such (like your father)"; that is, "you may not do all that he does; many things are his prerogative." This double aspect of the ego-ideal derives from the fact that the ego-ideal had the task of effecting the repression of the Oedipus complex, indeed, it is to that

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<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927 - 1st ed., 1942 - current ed.), p. 49.



revolutionary event that it owes its existence.... The super-ego retains the character of the father, while the more intense the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression (under the influence of discipline, religious teaching, schooling and reading) the more exacting later on is the domination of the super-ego over the ego -- in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, shame played a limited, one-dimensional role in Freudian psychology. That is, to Freud, shame functioned as a reaction-formation, a moral inhibitor of passions (namely, the sexual-exhibitionist drive). Typical of Freud's descriptions is this excerpt from "Character and Anal Erotism (1908)":

During the period of life which may be called the period of 'sexual latency' -- i.e. from the completion of the fifth year to the first manifestations of puberty (round about the eleventh year) -- reaction-formations, or counter-forces, such as shame, disgust and morality, are created in the mind. They are actually formed at the expense of the excitations proceeding from the erotogenic zones, and they rise like dams to oppose the later activity of the sexual instincts.<sup>5</sup>

Although Freud's conception of shame as a defense and an impetus to defense has endured, Freudian psychology has very little direct influence on shame studies today.<sup>6</sup> Freud's theory that shame emerged after the fifth year of a child's life has long since given way to earlier calculations. Furthermore, shame's role as a reaction-

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup>Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Erotism (1908)" *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 23 vols., trans. and gen. ed. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959), IX, 171.

<sup>6</sup>Susan Miller suggests that shame is described by Freud in other instances as an impetus to defense, although it is not called by name. She suggests furthermore, that Freud implies shame to be a defense against guilt. That is, since shame arises to thwart a person from acting upon sexual drives, and since acting on sexual drives can produce guilt, then shame acts as an defense against guilt.

Susan B. Miller, "Shame As An Impetus to the Creation of Conscience," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (1989) vol. 70, pp. 232-233.



formation is now considered a minor aspect of shame phenomena. Likening shame as a reaction-formation to a book, Susan Miller writes that although a book can be used to prop up a window, this is not a book's only, nor even its primary use.<sup>7</sup> Helen Lewis and Carl Schneider are among psychoanalysts who have returned to Freud's case material to find important unanalyzed dynamics of shame.<sup>8</sup>

It must be said, however, that while he did not identify them as such, Freud did identify psychic structures and dynamics now central to shame theory. Freud's insights on narcissism, for example, were ideas on which other psychoanalysts would later build. In "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)" Freud wrote, "Originally, this sense of guilt was a fear of punishment by the parents, or, more correctly, the fear of losing their love; later the parents are replaced by an indefinite number of fellow-men." Here, Freud speaks of the fear of abandonment, which Gerhart Piers would later call the deep anxiety in shame. Additionally Freud alludes to the transference of this parental fear to an "indefinite number of fellow-men," a phenomenon which would later become central to Kohut's conception of self-object transference and shame.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Susan B. Miller, *The Shame Experience* (London: The Analytic Press, dist. by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), pp. 392-432; Carl Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), pp. 92-108.

<sup>9</sup>Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)," *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XIV, 102; Gerhart Piers and Milton B. Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1953), p. 16; Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* Monograph 4 in the series *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* man. ed. Ruth S. Eissler, Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann, Marianne Kris and Seymour L. Lustman (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, Inc., 1971), p. 24.

## **B. Early Developments -- Distinguishing Shame From Guilt**

Early modern efforts to distinguish shame and guilt concentrated on distinguishing their varying phenomena. For psychoanalysts, phenomenology is closely linked to psychic structures, leading to the inclusion of theory of psychic origins also in this section.

Significant early modern writings center on the contributions of Erik Erikson (1950, 1959, 1963, 1968), G. Piers and M. Singer (1953), and particularly Helen M. Lynd (1958), and Helen B. Lewis (1971). Although these writings extend beyond Freud's conception of shame as a reaction-formation, they rely generally upon Freudian drive psychology. In this literature, shame theory emerged out of a recognition in guilt studies of shame as a related, yet distinct phenomenon from guilt. This phenomenon was believed to be structurally a part of the superego, but deeper and developmentally prior to guilt. Although Franz Alexander expanded the notion of shame as an impetus to defense in his paper, "Remarks about the Relation of Inferiority Feelings to Guilt Feelings" (1938), it was Erik Erikson, beginning in his 1950 version of *Childhood and Society*, who made the next significant modern advance in shame studies.<sup>10</sup>

### **1. Developmental Failure -- Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt**

Erik Erikson theorized that all children encounter a crisis with shame at about age two. If successfully negotiated, the child is left with a predominance of autonomy, and a weaker, though necessary, capacity for shame and doubt; however, if this stage is unsuccessfully negotiated, the

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<sup>10</sup>Franz Alexander, "Remarks about the Relation of Inferiority Feelings to Guilt Feelings" *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (1938), vol. 19, pp. 41-49.

child becomes forever 'stuck' in predominate patterns of debilitating shame, while autonomy remains underdeveloped.<sup>11</sup>

In all, Erikson devised eight stages of human psychosocial development. These stages always develop in the same order, although at different speeds for different people. This is all according to the principle of epigenesis, whereby the inherent ground plan for humans regulates different seasons of ascendancy for each portion of that plan, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole. Some variation of a continuum of polar characteristics will emerge in the person at each stage, depending upon how successfully the individual handles the conflicts of that stage. Notably, in Erikson's scheme, this shame crisis emerges prior to one's crisis with guilt, which emerges in stage three.<sup>12</sup>

Erikson first describes these stages in *Childhood and Society* (1950). Here, he characterizes stage two as "Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt." Erikson identified the core of development in this stage as centered upon anal muscular maturation. He writes that issues surrounding how children learn to defecate will determine a large part of these children's psychological orientations towards autonomy, shame and doubt throughout the rest of their lives. The anal zone lends itself to conflict because of its two distinct contradictory modes - retention and elimination.

The danger is in having a parent or another outsider impose a structure for anal training that is too rigid or too early in the child's development as prescribed by the child's internal blueprint. Children who suffer training

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<sup>11</sup>Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1950), pp. 222-224.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 219-234.

in such an environment, without the needed free choice, will turn against themselves all their urges to discriminate and manipulate, resulting in a precocious conscience and in shame and doubt. Later, *In Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959), Erikson was to add that the danger of parental overcontrol is particularly great in Western civilization where " ... the machine age has added the ideal of a mechanically trained, faultlessly functioning, and always clean, punctual, and deodorized body." The result is that Westerners have assumed that early and rigorous training is necessary, and they have gone too far with this.<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, if children learn to defecate out of a sense of self-control, without a loss of self-esteem and without arbitrary experiences of shame and doubt, they develop a sense of autonomy and pride. What is it, then, that young parents are to do to ensure a healthy growth environment for their young children? Erikson writes (1959), " ... be firm and tolerant with the child at this stage, and he will be firm and tolerant with himself. He will feel pride in being an autonomous person: he will grant autonomy to others; and now and again he will even let himself get away with something." However, concerning more specific instructions, Erikson admits that he and his fellow researchers have discovered more about what *not* to do, than what to do.<sup>14</sup>

Although Erikson's Freudian-based developmental scheme for shame has largely been replaced by theories based on self psychology, his locating of emerging shame issues separate from, and developmentally prior to guilt has grown to be a foundational assumption on which much of shame theory has been built. Moreover, his emphasis on the influence of a

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 222-223; Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1959), p. 69.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 71, 73.

parent's ability to model healthy autonomy, or unhealthy shame, laid the groundwork for theories later set forth by Kohut and others.

## 2. Exposure and Covering

Concerning a growing understanding of shame phenomenology (distinct from guilt) Erikson emphasized the centrality of exposure. He wrote,

Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at: in one word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible; which is why we dream of shame as a situation in which we are stared at in a condition of incomplete dress, in night attire, "with one's pants down."<sup>15</sup>

Helen M. Lynd went on to suggest that while shame often involves exposure in the eyes of other people, it always involves exposure to oneself, and it is this shame which is the most painful. Lynd also argued that the exposure in shame is also characteristically unexpected.<sup>16</sup> For Lynd, shame before one's own eyes can burn inside even though no one else may pay any attention to it or even know about it. Moreover, Lynd contended that shame before one's own eyes can live within a person long after the event has passed. For example, Lynd quotes Dostoevsky who wrote, "Even in forty years I would remember with loathing and humiliation those filthiest, most ludicrous, and most awful moments in my life. No one could have gone out of his way to degrade himself more shamelessly."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, p. 223.

<sup>16</sup>Lynd, pp. 32-34.

<sup>17</sup>Lynd, pp. 27-31.

Lynd even wondered if public humiliation did not sometimes divert and thereby ease the inner torment of shame before one's own eyes. In support, Lynd quotes an excerpt from the *Scarlet Letter*, where she writes that Dimmesdale said, "Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret!" Ibid., p. 31, citing Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground in The Short Novels of Dostoevsky* (Dial Press, 1945), p. 184, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Press), p. 85.

Closely connected to exposure, however, is covering. Continuing the above excerpt from Erikson, we read,

Shame is early expressed in an impulse to bury one's face or to sink, right then and there, into the ground. But this, I think, is essentially rage turned against the self. He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world. Instead he must wish for his own invisibility.<sup>18</sup>

Helen Lewis points to denial as a characteristic defense against shame. Lewis writes that there is "some intrinsic connection between shame and the mechanism of denial." Lewis goes on to conclude from her psychotherapeutic transcripts that denial explains why shame affect is often 'by-passed' with only a 'wince' or a 'jolt' felt in its place (even though the person is aware of the cognitive content of shame-connected events).<sup>19</sup>

Theorists have argued that by contrast, guilt has no such focus on exposure and covering. Lewis begins her chapter on the phenomenology of guilt by writing:

Specifically, the imagery of the self vis-a-vis the "other" is absent in guilt. In the experience of guilt, the self is doing the judging; the experience is thus self-contained and self-propelled. Guilt is about something specific about which the self is critical, in contrast to shame, where criticism or disapproval seems to emanate from "the other" and to envelop the whole self.<sup>20</sup>

Lewis goes on to suggest that in contrast to shame's affinity with denial, a characteristic defense against guilt is rationalization.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, p. 223.

<sup>19</sup>Lewis, p. 196-197.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 88-89.



### 3. Encompassing the Self

It was not just exposure, however, that characterized shame. It was exposure of the self. The relation of shame to the self was the focus of a study by Helen B. Lewis. An empirical study of how people perceived the world around them led Lewis and her colleagues to one of her critical areas of distinction between shame and guilt, i.e., the functioning of the self in relation to "identity," "boundary," and the localization of experience inside or outside the self. That is, for Lewis, shame was understood by learning about the structure of the self. Using transcripts from sessions with more than 180 counselees, Lewis concluded that self boundaries are softer and less clear for the shame-disposed person, and for that reason, localization of experience is more fluid in shame than guilt. Furthermore, while shame results in a self which is divided and not fully functional as a perceiver of information, by contrast with guilt, the self is intact and self-propelled.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Lewis concluded that although guilt is about a thing done, or undone, shame is about one's deficient self.<sup>23</sup> Phenomenologically, there is an affinity between shame and depressed feeling, and between guilt and obsessive thinking. Guilt is demonstrated in "problems" bothering the patient, and insoluble ideations about "whose fault it is." Shame ideations, on the other hand, tend to focus on "how awful the person is."<sup>24</sup>

For Lynd, shame goes deeper in a person than guilt, since it is worse to be inferior and isolated than to be wrong. Although Lynd saw shame and guilt as universal, she acknowledged different balances and stresses of the two

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13, 31-33, 39, 44, 126-136, 500.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 503, 497, 506-507.

coming into play for different people. Finally, Lynd concluded that while in theory, shame and guilt may be sharply distinguished, in practice this distinction is not so easily made (Lynd's distinctions between shame and guilt are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two).<sup>25</sup>

The emphasis for shame on the self (as opposed to an emphasis on actions for guilt) has become perhaps the chief phenomenological focus for shame in psychoanalysis. Gershen Kaufman writes, "To live with shame is to experience the very essence or heart of the self as wanting."<sup>26</sup> Morrison contends that since the self continually fails to receive responsiveness from the idealized selfobjects and therefore labors undernourished and atrophied, that the person feels an overwhelming sense of depletion.<sup>27</sup> This depletion is what one observes in the hollowness of the eyes of a person in the midst of shame -- the emptying out of the very soul of the person.

This focus on the self represented a departure from the Freudian language seen in Erikson's developmental 'crises' and Piers' psychic 'tensions.' Lewis also would retain language of the self, and Kohut's work would solidify this focus.

#### **4. Sense of Failure**

Chicago psychoanalyst Gerhart Piers' insights are contained in the first half of the small volume written with sociologist Milton Singer, entitled *Guilt and Shame* (1953). Piers gives an indication of the relative unimportance of shame to psychoanalysis in 1953 in writing that "Only

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<sup>25</sup>Lynd, pp. 207, 208-209.

<sup>26</sup>Charles L. Rassieur, "Ministry Without Shame," in *The Christian Ministry*, January, 1984, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup>Andrew Morrison, "The Eye Turned Inward: Shame and the Self," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 278.



Erikson and Alexander ascribe to shame an importance equal to 'guilt' in human pathology." Piers and Singer were among the first (along with Erikson) to suggest that shame arises, structurally, out of a tension between the Ego and the Ego-Ideal, not between the Ego and Super-Ego, as in guilt. They point out that while guilt is generated when a boundary is touched or transgressed, shame occurs when a goal (presented by the Ego-Ideal) is not being reached. Therefore, guilt anxiety accompanies *transgression*, while shame accompanies *failure*.<sup>28</sup>

### 5. Interplay Between Shame and Guilt

Gerhart Piers early demonstrated the inter-relatedness and polarity of guilt and shame. First, Piers set forth his idea of "vicious cycles" of guilt and shame, or sequences experienced in the following way: sexual impulse --> guilt --> inhibition and/or regression --> shame --> sexual acting out --> guilt (the cycle continues). For Piers, in such a scheme, "the dynamic polarity of the two forms of anxiety is clearly demonstrated." Neurotic individuals are left "floundering between the horns of two powerful anxieties." He concluded from his research that guilt and shame: a) are clearly differentiated, b) can lead to one another, and c) can conceal one another. Furthermore, Piers theorized that people can develop a predilection for one as opposed to the other. Although Helen B. Lewis later would expand greatly upon Piers' ideas, the early contributions of Gerhart Piers were foundational.<sup>29</sup>

While Lewis agreed to the type of interplay suggested by Piers, she acknowledges a great deal of complexity in

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<sup>28</sup>Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer, "Shame," in *Guilt and Shame*, ed. Herbert Morris, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971, p. 147. Also, Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt* (Springfield, Ill: Charles Thomas, Publ., 1953), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup>Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, pp. 18, 20, 28, 34-35.

distinguishing shame from guilt, for several reasons. First, Lewis noted that shame and guilt may be intertwined as defenses against each other. For example, one may feel ashamed of some failure in achievement and in the next moment feel guilty for caring about success. Or, one may feel guilty about some moral lapse -- guilt which shortly passes -- but also feel shame for moral weakness long after the specific lapse has been forgotten.<sup>30</sup>

Second, Lewis noted that when shame and guilt are both evoked in the context of moral transgression, the two states tend to fuse with each other, often being labeled 'guilt.' For example, guilty ideation might go like this: "How could I have *done that*; what an injurious *thing* to have done; how I *hurt so-and-so*; what a moral lapse that *act* was; what will become of that or *him*, now that I have neglected to do it, or injured him. How should I be *punished to make amends*?" Simultaneously, however, ashamed ideation might say: "How could *I* have done that; what an *idiot I am* -- how humiliating; what a *fool*, what an *uncontrolled person* -- how mortifying; how unlike *so-and-so*, who does not do such things; how *awful* and *worthless I am*." <sup>31</sup> Lewis notes that because a current of aggression has been activated against the self, both in one's own eyes and in the eyes of the 'other,' that a current of shame can keep both guilty ideation and shame affect alive long after appropriate amends have been made.

While the early modern writings of Erikson, Lynd, Piers and Lewis were devoted primarily to drawing distinctions between shame and guilt, later modern writings have turned nearly exclusively to understanding the multi-faceted nature of shame. We next turn to these writings.

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<sup>30</sup>Lewis, pp. 35-39, 46.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 35 - 39.

## C. Expanding Varieties of Chronic Shame

In the last two decades shame has emerged prominently in psychoanalysis. With lines of demarcation between shame and guilt securely in place in the minds of many, contemporary studies on shame phenomenology have turned to the expanding varieties of shame, particularly those suffered on a chronic basis.

The nature of shame remained focused on exposure and covering, and on the self. However, with developing self psychologies came growing complexity of shame phenomena.

### 1. Narcissism and Disorders of the Self

In many ways, Helen Lewis served as a transition figure in shame studies from drive psychology to self psychology. Lewis writes:

I have replaced Freud's narrow theoretical framework with a broader theory that assumes the cultural or social nature of human beings..... In this new framework, the self, however narcissistic or egotistical it appears, is a quintessentially social phenomenon.<sup>32</sup>

Given Lewis' emphasis on the self and on its social nature, it would seem plausible that Lewis' departure from Freudian theory was in large part prompted by her discovery of shame. Regardless, the emergence of self psychology has done as much as anything to fuel the growth in shame studies, primarily under the influence of Heinz Kohut.

Heinz Kohut's work forged a break with Freudian drive theory, in favor of disorders of the self (and narcissism). Essentially, Kohutian self psychology asserts that the self, not the ego, is the center of the psychological

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<sup>32</sup>Lewis, "Shame and the Narcissistic Personality," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1987), pp. 113-114.

universe. Moreover, psychological injury relates not to intrapsychic conflict (as characteristic of Freudian psychology) but to depletion, defect and fragmentation of the self. The goal in one's development, and in one's healing from self injury, is the development of a firm, cohesive self. This cohesive self is developed through esteem gained from one's parents and other significant people are introjected into a person's psyche to serve one's self needs.<sup>33</sup>

The psychological condition which has come to define disorders of the self is narcissism. In generic terms, narcissism is a positive experience of the self; it is loving or admiring oneself. However, in psychotherapy the term has come to represent the constellation of self disorders resulting from overinvestment in the self, unhealthily strong needs for affirmation of the self, and unstable swings between grandiosity and denigration of the self.<sup>34</sup> Finally, shame has come to be seen as the existential component, or central affect, of narcissism, accounting for shame emerging prominence alongside the emergence of narcissism.

Kohut's writings on narcissism and shame are found primarily in two books, *The Analysis of the Self* and *The Restoration of the Self*. In these books, Kohut suggested that shame propensity often develops from narcissistic

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<sup>33</sup>Kohut, pp. 1-34.

<sup>34</sup>Kernberg (1975) writes that narcissistic personalities show an "unusual degree of self-reference in their interaction with other people, a great need to be admired by others and a curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need of tribute from others." Kohut (1971) writes that narcissistic personalities are specifically unable to regulate self-esteem. "The specific (pathogenic) experiences ... fall into a spectrum ranging from anxious grandiosity and excitement on the one hand to mild embarrassment and self-consciousness or severe shame, hypochondria and depression on the other." Otto Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975), pp. 17-18; Kohut, 1971, p. 200.

trauma early in life. In the normal course of development, children establish a grandiose image of themselves through internalizing a grandiose image of their parents(s), as a selfobject.<sup>35</sup> The result is that the child feels like, "You (the parents) are perfect and I am part of you." As time progresses and the parents' shortcomings grow apparent, the child's perfect self-image of him/herself is toned down while the idealized parent selfobject evolves into an image of the ego-ideal (providing morals and values), which serves to regulate self-esteem, relatively independent of external factors. In short, the child's grandiose self is infused with reality of shortcomings, while the parental selfobject evolves into a significant, but not overbearing, role-model.<sup>36</sup>

However, according to Kohut, if the child experiences severe narcissistic trauma, the development of a mature, cohesive, and stable feeling of self is not achieved. Such trauma is seen as a lack of mirroring, which can be caused by a parent or other primary caretaker's own emotional repression or abuse of any kind (both of which render the caretaker unable to nourish a child's esteem and affirm his/her emotions). As a result, the archaic grandiosity is not integrated into the adult personality structure and *the person continues to strive for ultimate perfection* or for merger with a perfect selfobject. The child's failure to find a perfect selfobject, as increasing age reveals to him/her that such persons do not exist, results in a feeling of a fundamental defect in the self, or feelings of shame. Furthermore, Kohut asserts that this narcissistic disturbance may result not only in feelings of severe

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<sup>35</sup>For Kohut, a selfobject is a person, or object, undifferentiated from the self that serves the needs of the self. Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, pp. 26-27. Self-objects are acquired through a process Kohut would later call self-object transference. Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1977), p. xiii.

<sup>36</sup>Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, pp. 40-47, 105-114.

shame, but at times, feelings of archaic grandiosity, all of which leaves the person feeling vulnerable to a fragmentation of the self ("disintegration anxiety").<sup>37</sup>

In his book *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism* (1989), Andrew Morrison has criticized Kohut for failing to recognize the importance of the ideal self in creating experiences of shame. For Morrison, Kohut has put too much emphasis on the grandiose self in causing shame.<sup>38</sup> Morrison has also used Kohutian theory to argue that shame is neither a social nor an interpersonal phenomenon, but rather a manifestation of deficits of the self. Morrison points out that according to Kohut, it is a selfobject (not a real person, by implication) that when unresponsive to the self's needs fosters shame vulnerability.<sup>39</sup>

While Morrison's efforts to emphasize the role of the ideal self in shame have been well-received, his focus on the mechanics of the self has not proven to be a vital point. Kohut's micro focus on the self causes little to be gained by detaching theories of the self even further from their social contexts.

Parting company with Kohut and Morrison, Gershen Kaufman has emphasized the social and interpersonal nature of shame. For Kaufman, shame-based personalities are formed (and sustained) by a person's interaction with those people who have a significant place in the forming of that person's identity. Kaufman writes:

The need to identify, the wish to be like the deeply valued parent, is the motive which enables the parent to transmit, and the child to acquire, a personal culture. Parental mannerisms, styles of speech, ways of handling situations, certain ways of walking or even holding the body may become particularly enamored by a

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 37-56, 105-142.

<sup>38</sup>Andrew Morrison, "The Eye Turned Inward: Shame and the Self," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 79.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.



child and unconsciously adopted as though the child were acquiring a part of the parent or practicing to be like the parent. Whoever becomes significant to the child, be it parent, sibling, relative, or friend, becomes important enough to arouse the need to identify.<sup>40</sup>

It is in these "identification needs" and through the social processes that meet them that a person forms a core personality and identity either firm and strong, or shame-ridden. While Kaufman writes that the forming of personality, like Kohut, is effected primarily through the eye contact between persons, unlike Kohut, Kaufman sees the process continuing well beyond infancy. Moreover, Kaufman cites not only the participation of significant individuals other than parents, but "of rootedness, connectedness, and a sense of communality with others" (i.e., community).<sup>41</sup>

Kaufman goes on to write of the end result of a personality which has had its identification needs met with shame:

Internalization of shame means that the affect of shame is no longer merely one affect or feeling among many which become activated at various times and then pass on. Rather, internalized shame is now experienced as a deep abiding sense of being defective, never quite good enough as a person. It forms the foundation around which other feelings about the self will be experienced. This affect-belief lies at the core of the self and gradually recedes from consciousness. In this way, shame becomes basic to the sense of identity.<sup>42</sup>

Kaufman's conception of shame as basic to a person's identity forms a bit of a contrast to Kohut's theory of shame proneness as repeated, discrete experiences (as repeated selfobjects fail to mirror a person's needed grandiosity). Both theorists, however, describe an experience of chronic shame, lodged in and revolving around the self, the focus of contemporary theories of shame.

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<sup>40</sup>Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, 2nd ed., (Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1985), p. 50.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.



## 2. Growing Complexity of Shame Phenomena

With advancing theory of shame's origins has come advancing understanding of the complexity of shame phenomena. In an effort to pull together some of the advancing views, Donald Nathanson served as general editor for a collection of articles in his book *The Many Faces of Shame*. In his introduction to the book, Nathanson summed up the then (and now) state of shame studies as follows:

As editor, studying each chapter in its many versions, trying to find a way to link these disparate views of shame into a coherent whole, I began to see the chapters in a visual metaphor. Initially appearing as a group of separate islands, in some cases completely cut off from each other by waters too wide to bridge, they began to group in my mind as an archipelago, a series of geographical formations connected beneath the surface. All that remained was to drop below the surface of the water and establish a new topography.<sup>43</sup>

Nathanson's description of the "disparate views" of shame may be one reason why shame is often described but rarely defined in contemporary psychoanalytic literature. As Morrison puts it, the many emerging descriptions are each "capturing a piece of the elephant" called 'shame,' but none claims comprehensiveness in scope and many have left theorists vaguely confused and dissatisfied as to the completeness of their work.<sup>44</sup>

As examples of shame's many faces, first, many have tried to capture the essence of what is experienced by the self in shame. Morrison calls "unacceptability" a major feeling accompanying shame, and he also points to the significant relationship between shame and feelings of self-depletion and fragmentation.<sup>45</sup> Wurmser contends that shame can

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<sup>43</sup>Donald Nathanson, "Preface," in *The Many Faces of Shame* (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. ix.

<sup>44</sup>Andrew Morrison, *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism* (Hillsdale, N.J: The Analytic Press, 1989), p. x.

<sup>45</sup>Morrison, "The Eye Turned Inward," pp. 278, 281.

always be traced to a basic triad of weakness, defectiveness, and dirtiness as its original content: "I am unlovable because I am weak and failing; or because I'm defective and mutilated; or because my body, my wishes, my feelings are filthy."<sup>46</sup>

As a second 'face' of shame, other theorists have aimed to capture the varying qualities of shame affect. Lewis distinguished between "overt, unidentified shame" (shame affect to the fore, clearly apparent to an observer) and "by-passed shame" (events which might appropriately produce shame, but which did not; as the person by-passed the shame, a wince was experienced, followed by doubt). Lewis puts it this way: "By-passed shame, by definition unidentified, operates along the same lines as overt shame: hostility evoked in connection with by-passed shame cannot be discharged against the 'other' because of guilt, and so is transformed into obsessive and/or paranoid ideation, or into irrational dread of the 'other.'"<sup>47</sup>

As a third 'face' of shame, Leon Wurmser has developed categories of shame anxiety (before the event) shame affect, which he calls a "complex reaction pattern" (after the act), and finally, shame as preventive attitude, which he characterized by this statement: "I must always hide and dissemble, in order not to be exposed and disgraced."<sup>48</sup> To these distinctions, Gershen Kaufman adds primary shame and secondary shame. Using eating disorder addictions as an example, Kaufman contends that addicts suffer secondary shame for being an addict, while primary shame was centrally involved in their becoming addicts in the first place.

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<sup>46</sup>Leon Wurmser, "Shame: The Veiled Companion of Narcissism," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, Donald Nathanson (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 78.

<sup>47</sup>Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, pp. 503-508.

<sup>48</sup>Schneider, pp. 19-25; Wurmser, p. 68.

Additionally, expanding varieties of shame has led to an awareness of many 'close relations' of shame. Helen Lewis cites, for example, mortification, humiliation, embarrassment, chagrin, shyness, modesty, and feeling ridiculous. Lewis notes that while they can all be considered different psychological states, they share "the common property of being directly about the self and overtly involving the other as referent in the experience." Therefore, Lewis treats them as "variants of the shame family."<sup>49</sup>

Lastly, Carl Schneider points to the difficulty even in restricting shame's categorization to an emotion. He suggests that although it is an affect when a person implores another, "Do you have no shame?," a dispositional character is also evident. For this reason, Schneider compares difficulties in capturing the essence of shame to that of capturing Christian love (is it a feeling?, a disposition?, and attitude of will?, a way of acting toward others...?), and he concludes it is an "order of things."<sup>50</sup>

In the end, in its contemporary state, shame phenomena remain complex and elusive, prompting Robert Karen to write "A comprehensive picture of how shame operates in psychopathology is not yet drawn. It may never be. Once grasped, the concept seems to change into a thousand shapes in one's hand. It grows from complexity to complexity until suddenly it seems to be everywhere...."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Lewis, "Shame and the Narcissistic Personality," p. 110.

Nathanson joins Lewis in arguing for a "shame family of emotions" (a phrase he borrows from Leon Wurmser). To Lewis' list of emotions in the shame family, Nathanson adds disgrace, dishonor, degradation, debasement, shyness, bashfulness modesty and the experiences of being put down, slighted and thought of as contemptible.

D. Nathanson, "A Timetable for Shame," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. D. Nathanson (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup>Schneider, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup>Robert Karen, "Shame," *The Atlantic*, vol. 269, no. 2 (February, 1992), 64.

### 3. Good Shame

Although she recognized ways shame could be destructive, Helen M. Lynd focused primarily upon shame's value in discovering identity, through what shame reveals (however painfully) about self, and self in society. Lynd notes that "... fully faced, shame may become not primarily something to be covered, but a positive experience of revelation (of self)." Lynd's focus on identity led her to focus not on the ego, but on the 'self' -- a concept she described simply as wide enough to encompass identity.<sup>52</sup>

Lynd suggests that the emphasis on roles in our society has led to an externalization and de-personalization which has obscured identity. Lynd's 'answer' is for all people to learn to recognize irrational from rational authorities, and unalterable from alterable ones; shame experiences, described as a sudden incongruity between oneself and the social institution, provide crucial information concerning oneself in one's society.<sup>53</sup> For Lynd therefore, shame is about self-discovery, but only as one integrates this with societal discovery.

### 4. Gender Issues

The early writings of Helen M. Lynd and Helen Lewis remain foundational for modern shame studies. Significantly, both of these theorists were women, possibly because shame has been thought to be an experience more common to women. Lewis' own research found women more field dependent than men, causing her to conclude that women have a greater susceptibility to shame (and to depression resulting from excessive shame). Conversely, her findings suggest that men, being more field independent, should have a greater

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<sup>52</sup>Lynd, pp. 18-20, 166-167.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 192, 203ff.

susceptibility to guilt (and to obsessions resulting from excessive guilt). In her research, Lewis found field dependent people to merge readily with their surroundings. They tended to be self-effacing; when self-conscious, field dependent people appeared awkward or shy. By contrast, field independent people were described as having an 'organized' self which took initiative in vigilantly defending themselves in the field.<sup>54</sup>

Carol Gilligan, in her book *In A Different Voice* (1982), would appear to offer additional reasons for shame feelings being more predominant in women, in citing Nancy Chodorow's empirical findings that little girls build their identity around relationship (growing out of their identification with the same-sex nurturing mother), while little boys built their identity around issues of separation and individuation.<sup>55</sup> In that shame functions socially while guilt functions in relation to conscience, this would seem to support Lewis' conclusion that girls would have a greater propensity to shame and boys to guilt. Lewis was to suggest later that with shame being a phenomenon to which women are more susceptible, Freud's disinterest in it reflects his sexism -- a sexism which she says is still apparent in psychiatry.<sup>56</sup>

#### **D. Defenses Against Shame**

While many theorists have focused on shame's origins and phenomena, others have suggested that shame is best understood by attending to mechanisms of defense. For Leon Wurmser, defense stands at the heart of the nature of

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<sup>54</sup>Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, pp. 48-51.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 499; Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 9-13.

<sup>56</sup>Helen B. Lewis, "Introduction: Shame -- the 'Sleeper' in Psychopathology" *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1987), pp. 4-5.

shame. Writing from a distinctly Freudian standpoint, Wurmser notes that all affects appear to have an inherent 'goal' (moods, by contrast, do not have such a goal). For example, with anxiety the goal is flight whether it is global (running away) or partial (hiding, forgetting). Hatred and anger have the aim of fight and destruction; contempt has the aim of elimination of the object. Wurmser continues:

Shame's aim is disappearance. This may be most simply, in the form of hiding; most radically, in the form of dissolution (suicide); most mythically, in the form of changing into another shape, an animal or a stone; most archaically, in the form of freezing into complete paralysis and stupor; most frequently, in the form of forgetting parts of one's life, and one's self; and at its most differentiated, in the form of changing one's character.<sup>57</sup>

But shame's covering has countless disguises, which Wurmser characterizes as "myriad vain efforts to restore love and acceptance." Even shamelessness, writes Wurmser, is a mask of shame.<sup>58</sup>

Writing roughly from a standpoint similar to Wurmser, Donald Nathanson has sought to simplify shame's outward face in peoples' lives to four defense groups, which Nathanson labels the compass of shame. These four basic defensive scripts are withdrawal, attack self, avoidance, and attack other. Nathanson suggests that all people favor one style predominantly and it is a person's development in relation to shame and this defense which largely shapes the birth of the self.<sup>59</sup>

While Wurmser and Nathanson saw shame as defense, other psychoanalysts, particularly self psychologists saw shame more as an affect than a defense, but an affect against

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>58</sup>Wurmser, pp. 87, 206.

<sup>59</sup>Donald Nathanson, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992), pp. 312-313.



which defenses are erected. Notable among these is Gershen Kaufman, who suggested five basic defenses against shame: rage, contempt, striving for power, striving for perfection, and blaming.<sup>60</sup> Finally, still others, such as Andrew Morrison, have recognized the viability of both theories, arguing that shame can be viewed both as defense and as painful affect (although he argues that the affective component predominates).<sup>61</sup> Among pastoral theologians, Kaufman's scheme has gained the widest acceptance (see Patton [1985] and Capps [1993]).

### **E. Therapeutic Means of Discharging Shame**

Compared to descriptions of shame's origins and phenomena, contributions toward the therapeutic means of discharging chronic shame have been less widespread. This may stem from the difficulty of the task. Piers and Lewis were among those to suggest early-on that shame was more difficult to discharge than guilt. Although Piers saw shame as having "progressive" and "self-curative" elements, he also saw shame as harder to confront in therapy than guilt. Lewis suggested that shame is intrinsically more difficult to discharge than guilt because hostilities in shame are wrapped up in the position of the self.<sup>62</sup>

Probably the most influential psychoanalytic model for discharging shame comes from Kohut. Kohut's theory is based upon a reactivation of the early processes of self formation, in an effort to reconcile the unintegrated portions of the self to the nuclear self. This is accomplished through selfobject transferences between the therapist and the counselee whereby the therapist quite self-consciously seeks to serve in the archaic parental role of providing an omnipotent selfobject and then an

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<sup>60</sup>Kaufman, pp. 75-83.

<sup>61</sup>Morrison, *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism*, p. 195.

<sup>62</sup>Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, p. 497.



idealizing selfobject with which the counselee can merge. The key to these transferences is the therapist's ability to communicate empathy. Through these transferences, the therapist aims first, to fulfill the counselee's unmet narcissistic wishes, and then to help the counselee begin integrating these unreal omnipotent and ideal wishes into a reality-oriented ego, which forms a cohesive self.<sup>63</sup>

Kohut's model is pure psychoanalysis, aimed at surgery to poorly formed self structures. As is evident in Kohut's description of narcissism, he sees self structures as mechanistic parts, treatable essentially in detached relation from one's social context. Again, Gershen Kaufman takes up a different approach.

While Kohut's approach aims at restoring the self, Kaufman's approach aims at "restoring the interpersonal bridge." Kaufman's therapeutic aim is to assist the counselee in learning how to recognize and *understand* shame dynamics in one's life, namely by returning to their interpersonal historical roots. For Kaufman, these interpersonal roots include not only primary caretakers, but such factors as the social impact on a child who was born with a temperament counter to societal norms (i.e., an aggressive girl or an introverted boy).<sup>64</sup>

Kaufman's model, therefore, is insight-oriented. Once one understands where shame originates, one can diffuse shame on the outside before it is internalized. Kaufman's model is much like that of John Bradshaw, who also focuses on the externalizing process. For Bradshaw, externalization is achieved by uncovering the shame that one is normally too pained to confront. That is, one must locate and liberate one's lost, abandoned and hurt inner child; integrate disowned parts of oneself into one's true self; heal one's

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<sup>63</sup>Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, 37-56, 105-142.

<sup>64</sup>Kaufman, p. 127.

damaging shaming memories; confront shaming inner voices; and learn to love oneself.<sup>65</sup>

Heinz Kohut's theory based on empathic immersion in the client's experience remains the most authoritative therapeutic approach to-date. Kohut himself claimed successes with his therapy, but his methods were still evolving, even at the time of his death. Moreover, barriers to this approach include its complexity, as well as its long-term orientation. One suspects it is attempted in its pure form only by the most devoted of Kohut's followers. Kaufman's approach probably is more broadly accessible to therapists, and has the appeal of considering interpersonal, as well as intrapsychic, factors. However, again, the success of his methods is difficult to chart. Bradshaw's focus on externalization is probably most widely accessible to a lay audience. However, given shame's deep-seated roots, one suspects his self-help approach can bring partial relief.

## Conclusion

Psychoanalytic studies have made considerable advances in formulating shame's phenomena and origins. While many early studies focused on understanding distinctive roles of shame and guilt in psychoanalysis, recent work has focused almost entirely on shame. Moreover, in the last decade these studies have focused not on discrete experiences of shame, but on what theorists have understood as chronic shame experiences growing out of a shame-based personality.

Less headway, however, has been made in developing methods for discharging shame. Primary psychotherapeutic remedies to-date consist first, in Heinz Kohut's method of restoring

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<sup>65</sup>John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame That Binds You* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1988), pp. 115-116, 117ff.

self structures through empathic immersion by the therapist into the client's experience. Second, Gershen Kaufman's therapeutic approach similarly seeks healing for the self, but by means of restoring interpersonal bonds (rather than restoring self structures).

Finally, with the exception primarily of Helen Lynd, who has considered the role of shame in discovering identity, psychoanalytic studies on shame have focused predominantly on destructive shame. It may be that discovering ways to combat destructive shame means exploring the degree to which shame can serve in a positive role.

## **II. Shame in Sociology**

Shame has not received nearly the attention in sociology in recent years as it has in psychology, possibly because present-day shame in America has emerged with a great deal of reference to the self, rather than to social structures. A notable exception is the writing of Agnes Heller, who has made a significant recent contribution to the field, dealing especially with the changing nature of authorities with shame.

### **A. Sanctions and Authorities**

In understanding shame, and distinguishing it from guilt, sociologists have focused on the nature of sanctions and authorities. Milton Singer points to the work of Margaret Mead as the beginning of early modern sociological advancements in shame studies.

Mead was an anthropologist, and in the course of her work on cooperation and competition among cultures, Mead's work led her to issues of shame and guilt. Writing in her

influential work *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* Mead interpreted her findings to support the prevailing view that shame cultures were governed by external sanctions and guilt cultures were characterized by internal sanctions.

The impact of Mead's conclusions was to contribute to the dominant thinking that guilt cultures were highly individualistic cultures, capable of industrialization and possessed of moral standards which are effectively enforced by a religious "conscience" and dedicated to the welfare and dignity of the individual. By contrast, shame cultures were dominated by crowd psychology, and said to be static, industrially backward, and without absolute moral standards.<sup>66</sup>

For his own part, Singer argued that Mead's distinction between internal and external sanctions was unfounded. Singer cited various cultural studies to argue that both shame and guilt could involve internal sanctions, and that any attempt to make neat distinctions along these lines was naive.<sup>67</sup>

More recently, Agnes Heller has argued that the way to distinguish shame and guilt is not in terms of sanctions, but authority. Heller posits that while the sanction is internal for both shame and guilt, the authority is always external with shame and internal with guilt. However, writes Heller, external authority remains external only when the following three conditions exist: (a) the norms of conduct are homogeneous (i.e., norms apply to everyone belonging to the same 'cluster' of age, sex, etc.); (b) the community is small; and (c) social change is not noticeable for co-existing generations. To the degree

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<sup>66</sup>Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, p. 63-70. Margaret Mead, *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*, (New York: McGraw Hill Pub: 1937).

<sup>67</sup>Piers and Singer, *Shame and Guilt*, p. 71-84.

these conditions do not exist, external authority becomes internalized and *practical reason* (among individuals) must supplement (not replace) *social custom* as the governing authority for shame.<sup>68</sup> That is, people begin to question whether or not traditional social norms are the only good ones, or if they are good at all.

## B. Shame in America Today

The reason Heller has developed the three criteria listed above is her recognition of the changing face of shame in America today. In applying her three criteria to modern America, she concludes that Americans no longer live in small communities. For this reason, shared communal norms and the "Ideal Eye" of religion have eroded, and internal, rational authorities have emerged to take their place.<sup>69</sup>

Underlying Heller's analysis is her belief that shame is innate. Therefore, it cannot be circumvented, but only shifted. This shift has occurred in two directions. Heller writes,

The external authority of human conduct has been particularized and homogenized in one-dimensionality on the one hand, and universalized on the other.... The particularization of shame has come about within the

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<sup>68</sup>Agnes Heller, *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 2-8.

A number of social scientists have suggested reasons why American society has undergone a decline in shared societal values in the last half century or so. Daniel Bell has cited the impotence of the church in contributing the moral fiber that it once did to American society now overrun with hedonism, secularization and declining moral responsibility. Richard Sennett has identified the modern person's shattered sense of self-identity and self-definition, which appears publicly as a lack of moral responsibility. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has concluded that in this technological age, law and technique have replaced a commitment to moral absolutes.

Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 67, 78-79.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

nuclear family where norms have *lost their impersonality*, while the one-dimensional homogenization of shame has come about within societies (in the plural) in which norms have *lost their hierarchical structure*.<sup>70</sup>

Heller goes on to explain first, about the particularization of shame, that because of the demise of communal norms, nuclear families today have not become mere repositories of impersonal customs and habits. Rather, families themselves have discriminated between norms, accepting some and rejecting others. Therefore, whereas before, a child would not take it as a personal offense to fit into common patterns, now when the behavior patterns of parents are just their own, then the authority becomes personal, and shame sensitivity is amplified, with punishments experienced as a want of love.

Second, regarding the one-dimensionality of shame, Heller writes that the value placed on success has now superceded the value placed on the ethical path one takes to reach that success. Heller observes that shame today serves not so much as a sanction for unethical behavior, as a sanction for being unsuccessful. Heller writes,

"To be good at *something* has always belonged to the expectations embodied in the system of rules but it has never before been the decisive one. If someone was good at hunting but reluctant to share, the person in question was not regarded as good at all."<sup>71</sup>

Today, however, all that has changed as the means of achieving success has grown invisible to the communal eye. Heller writes, "One can be successful at almost anything and the means of achieving success matters less and less."<sup>72</sup>

Heller goes on to argue that along with the one-

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.



dimensionality of shame came the disappearance of ritualized outlets or shame, in at least two ways. First, apologizing has been a typical form of ritualized repayment; but if the father's moral code has become more or less personal, and it depends on his mood whether or not apologizing is required, shame is not discharged through apologizing. Either ritual is no longer internalized or it becomes excessive and present even when not required. Second, in a world where success alone is valued, because success is always relative to others, one may constantly be in debt without being able to repay. Heller concludes, "In one-dimensionality, no shame experience can be mitigated by any kind of ritualization, for no repayment practice is available. When this is so, the only outlets that remain are aggression and self-aggression."<sup>73</sup>

Heller makes a compelling argument about changes in societal structures with regard to authority. What she appears less clear about, however, is how the authorities become constraining for some people and not constraining for others. Thomas Scheff seeks to explore the answer to this question by arguing that understanding shame in modern-day America is a matter of attending not only to interpersonal, but intrapsychic factors. Calling his model a "microsociology" view of shame, Scheff borrows from Helen Lewis' psychoanalytic theory of overt and bypassed shame to explain the low visibility of shame in social interaction. Based on Lewis' work, Scheff concludes that because responses vary widely to similar stimuli, that issues of "self-esteem" must influence the process. That is, people who have "high self-esteem" do not yield to shame, while those with "low self-esteem" do yield. Moreover, Scheff introduces the concept of "pathological shame" at this point indicating that "Low self-esteem might be conceptualized as a tendency toward endlessly recursive shame, spirals of potentially limitless intensity and

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 20-21.



duration."<sup>74</sup>

In light of the growing body of knowledge presently being produced by psychoanalysts concerning the psychological dynamics of shame, Scheff's theory about self-esteem is not particularly illuminating. However, his intuition to explore the effects of both social and psychological factors with respect to modern-day experiences of shame may be a reliable guide concerning the way forward. With an eye toward both the psychological and social factors creating experiences of chronic shame, we now turn to offerings in pastoral theology.

### **III. Shame in Pastoral Theology**

Pastoral theologians have only recently added their voices to developments in psychoanalysis, and these contributions rely heavily on psychoanalytic theory, particularly Kohutian self psychology. Pastoral theologians' work has revolved mainly around shame theologies of sin and grace. Historically, shame is evident in the cure of souls (forerunner to pastoral theology) mainly as a tool to bring about remorse and repentance.

#### **A. Historical Perspective -- Public Penance and Public Repentance**

Historically in the cure of souls, shame has emerged explicitly in relation to public confession, during the first five hundred years of the church, and to repentance, for a period of years immediately following the Protestant Reformation.

Public confession can be observed as early as the biblical

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<sup>74</sup>Thomas J. Scheff, *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 71-95.

writings of James, who encouraged the believers to "Confess your sins to one another so that they might pray for you and you will be healed." (James 5:16). J. T. McNeill writes that church fathers' writings on reconciliation in the early centuries of the church were characterized most by language of exomologesis (confession) and metanoia (repentance). For approximately the first five hundred years of the Christian church, confession was made in the presence of the bishop and the congregation. McNeill cites prevailing views in the writings of Origen, who believed, "For sins of every kind are to be confessed and everything we do is to be made public. If we do anything secretly, if we commit any sin in word alone, or in the secrets of our thoughts, all must be published, all brought to light."<sup>75</sup>

The "publishing" of sin, as one would expect, brought shame. McNeill writes that while "Tertullian, Origen and Ambrose seem to regard the public humiliation as its most dreaded feature," all three supported public confession as preferable to continuing in sin. Tertullian writes in *On Repentance* (ca. 197), "Is it better to be damned in secret than to be absolved in public?"<sup>76</sup> Ambrose also encouraged people to overcome their fear of public exposure, writing in the fourth century, "Ask the church therefore, to pray for you; there is nothing in this that need make you blush, unless it be for failing to admit your guilt, since we are all sinners."<sup>77</sup> In all likelihood, the discomfort of shame in connection with public confession may have been among the reasons for the eventual demise of public confession.

Not only was confession practiced publicly during the first five hundred years of the church, but penance also.

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<sup>75</sup>John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (London: SCM Press, Ltd, 1952), pp. 90-94.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>77</sup>Max Thurian, *Confession* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1958), p. 69.

McNeill details four grades of penitence marking a progressive return to communion. "Weepers" or "mourners" stood outside the door of the church, beseeching Christians to pray for them; "hearers" were placed in the narthex; "kneelers" knelt within the nave amid the standing congregation; and "co-standers" joined normally in services with other people, yet could not take part in communion. Sometimes, this progressive restoration could take years. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 398), for example commanded a penance for homicide of twenty-seven years, although the period could be reduced for signs of contrition and repentance.<sup>78</sup>

During the sixth through the tenth centuries, penance remained the chief practice of reconciliation. However, public confession gradually gave way to private confession, one would suspect possibly because of the discomfort of shame in public confession. Whether or not the shame of public confession assisted the guilty person in bringing about contrition is difficult to evaluate. In light of modern-day studies, one suspects that while public confession may have appeased a person's guilt, the added shame was simply another form of penitential punishment. Moreover, because in light of present-day scholarship guilt is believed to be discharged through reparation (but shame only through transformation), one would suspect that penance itself may have been effective at discharging guilt, but may rather have only added to a person's shame.

While the pre-Reformation Catholic church emphasized penance, the post-Reformation Protestant church emphasized repentance for reconciliation of people's sin. This emphasis on repentance grew out of a concern to move from an emphasis on outward practice to inward change. Martin Luther had reacted strongly to abuses in the practice of indulgences. In its place, he sought a pastoral theology

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<sup>78</sup>McNeill, pp. 96-98.

based on contrition for sin and the forgiveness of God.<sup>79</sup>

McNeill notes that while inward change was the emphasis provided by the Reformers, not too many years later inward change began being enforced through outward means. Like practices of public confession and penance in the early centuries of the Christian Church, ecclesial discipline in the first centuries of the Scottish Presbyterian Church was often carried out in public, incorporating humiliation as a motivator toward repentance. One such practice was the use of the stool of repentance, on which offenders stood in a prominent place during sermons. The Church also used an iron collar chained to the wall for offending men and a bridle for women. Rites of repentance for murder, in the case of an individual who escaped sanction by the civil courts but was known to be guilty, consisted of having the culprit stand three Sundays in front of the church, barefooted and bareheaded and in base apparel, bearing the weapon used in his crime, and pleading for reconciliation.<sup>80</sup>

However, just as public confession and penance met its demise in the early Christian church, it would appear so also did intentional uses of humiliation. Several centuries later, in his 1889 lectures on pastoral theology delivered to the Cambridge Divinity school, Rev. Herbert James, rector of Livermere, Suffolk and fellow of King's College, Cambridge apparently held this story up as a pastoral model:

But I have known great good to ensue from "the gentleness of loving correction." A clergyman in Suffolk had occasion to deal with one of his farmers, a leading man in his parish, on this ground. He called to speak to him about it and found by the man's look that he was quite aware of the object of his visit.

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<sup>79</sup>Martin Luther, "Small Catechism (1529)" cited in Theodore G. Tappert, trans and ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 350, 457, 459-460.

<sup>80</sup>McNeill, pp. 250-251.

There was an evident bracing-up for opposition. But my friend very tenderly addressed himself to the man's heart as a sinning man wishful to be helpful to a fellow sinner. he so touched the springs of right feeling that the man utterly broke down. And he who had determined, as he said afterwards to knock my friend down if he had spoken in the way of stern reproof, was after no very long interval brought as a humble penitent to the Saviour's feet, and became a very right hand in the parish.<sup>81</sup>

In contrast to pastoral practice employing iron collars and stools of repentance, James' attention given to how the clergyman "tenderly addressed" himself to the man's heart would appear to be an indication of how pastoral practice with respect to shame changed over those centuries.

It may not be, however, that changing pastoral practice with respect to shame, has indeed dispensed with shame. Richard Sennett argues that on a societal level, shaming indifference has replaced overt punishment as the everyday tool of discipline in Western society. In the 18th and 19th centuries, workers and servants were hit or beaten for discipline. However, during the 19th century physical reprimands were seen as uncivilized, and gave way to shaming reprimands. Sennett continues:

What then happens to authority when the punishment society allows is restricted -- when neither the whip, starvation, nor the loss of a job is permitted?

Shame has taken the place of violence as a routine form of punishment in Western societies.... Rather than the employer explicitly saying, 'You are dirt' or 'Look how much better I am,' all he needs to do is his job -- exercise his skill or deploy his calm and indifference..... It is not so much abrupt moments of humiliation as month after month of disregarding his employees, of not taking them seriously, which establishes his domination. The feelings he has about them, they about him, need never be stated. The grinding down of his employees' sense of self-worth is not part of his discourse with them; it is a silent erosion of their sense of self-worth which will wear them down.... When shame is silent, implicit, it

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<sup>81</sup>Herbert James, *The Country Clergyman and His Work: Six Lectures on Pastoral Theology Delivered in the Divinity School, Cambridge, May Term, 1889* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1889), pp. 102-103.

becomes a patent tool of bringing people to heel.<sup>82</sup>

Sennett's comments are included here because they may provide a larger context within which to view pastoral practice with shame. Just as discipline and punishment on a societal level may have gone from overt to covert, shame may be present in pastoral practice today, but simply in less overt ways than iron collars. In other words, shame with regard to pastoral practice may not have disappeared so much as changed its form. In fact, it is this more inward, underlying problem of chronic shame about which modern-day pastoral theologians have concerned themselves most, and it is to these that we now turn.

## **B. Contemporary Perspectives**

Contemporary perspectives on shame in pastoral theology have focused on the nature of the problem and on responses to it. Depending heavily on psychoanalytic findings, Donald Capps has reconceived sin in terms of "problematics of the self." Moreover, Capps and Lewis Smedes have developed responses to shame focused on self-trust and self-acceptance, respectively. Paralleling a similar debate in psychoanalysis, Capps and Smedes' models reflect varying emphases on self versus self in social context.

### **1. Reconsidering Sin in a Shame Context**

In his book, *The Depleted Self: Sin in A Narcissistic Age* (1993), Donald Capps used empirical studies to seek to demonstrate that Americans today, including both laity and clergy in Christian churches, are suffering from a constellation of issues which reflect a narcissistic orientation toward life. These narcissistic 'sins' are reflected by the growing experience for Americans of self-

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<sup>82</sup>Richard Sennett, *Authority* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), pp. 92-95.



depletion, i.e., a deep sense of feeling depressed, demoralized, devalued and needy, created by a deep nameless shame.<sup>83</sup>

Capps goes on to argue that because narcissism is a disorder of the self, a theology of sin requires a theological construct based upon the self. In Capps' theological construct shame illumines three problematics of the self, namely "the divided self," the defensive self," and "the depleted self." The "divided self" is when the self experiences itself as divided or split, a phenomenon which Capps understands in Kohutian terms of the bi-polar scheme of the grandiose self and the idealizing self, either of which may experience shame. The "defensive self" is the primary area in which Capps writes explicitly about sin. Whereas, for Capps, shame experiences are not wrongful in themselves, one must be held responsible for the sins resulting from one's defensiveness against shame. The crux of sin is that one defends against shame by shaming others, and it is in this realm that Capps argues that a theology of shame does not have to be "soft on sin."<sup>84</sup>

Thirdly, Capps discusses the "depleted self," the long-term effect of failure to find a supplier for one's intense narcissistic needs. Depletion is felt as a failure to live lives of significance and meaning, bordering on despair, and the challenge, therefore, is to learn to live with failure. Depletion best encompasses deep "nameless shame." Writes Capps,

The words that capture this deeper, inner experience of shame are not humiliation and embarrassment, but words like empty, exhaustion, drained, demoralized depressed, deflated, bereft, needy, apathetic, passivity, deadness, starving. If humiliation and embarrassment are good words for describing the feature of shame that can be named, depletion and its various synonyms

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<sup>83</sup>Capps, pp. 39-69, 99.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92, 94-97.



capture our 'nameless shame,' the shame that is often too deep and too devastating for words.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, following on with his argument here, Capps wants to dispel the notion that individualism is the cause of sin. Rather, the answer to the problematics and sin of shame lie in filling up the self.

Capps' three self constructs are supported in related literature on narcissism, and his psychoanalytic insights are creative and practical. Perhaps, the least satisfying component of Capps' sin construct, however, is the theological component. Capps' overriding burden is to attend to the needs of the 'endangered' self, and this concern is reflected in his sin constructs which make no reference to a transcendent God, a dimension which although possibly out of the realm of his primary concerns, nevertheless would seem to depart from Christian tradition as a construct for sin.

## **2. Pastoral Responses**

Responses to chronic shame have been offered not only by Capps, but by pastoral theologians Lewis Smedes and Jeff VanVonderen. Smedes calls shame sufferers to seek "spiritual experiences" of "accepting grace." These experiences are found in everyday interaction with people, including friends and family members. For Smedes, such experiences lead to self-acceptance, a crucial ingredient in discharging shame and in experiencing the "lightness of grace."<sup>86</sup>

In response to "problematics of the self, Capps focuses on "self-care as a moral imperative." In particular, Capps calls for self-trust. He draws upon Scripture in narrative fashion, seeking to show, for example, how the woman who

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>86</sup>Smedes, pp. 125-158.

anointed Jesus' feet with perfume engaged in a clear act of self-trust (implying that the woman's bold actions broke barriers of social custom).

Like Smedes, who finds both sources of shame and remedies for shame in social relations, Capps goes on to suggest that self-care is a social process, where, in its best form, self-trust is mutually exchanged. Such was the case in the woman's exchange with Jesus, who affirmed her actions, demonstrating his own self-trust.<sup>87</sup> However, Capps' reliance on Kohutian "mirroring" and also on finding one's "true self" as the desired end of counseling tend to show that the primary process of healing, as well as ultimate end in recovery, is self-related.

In this way, Capps and Smedes mirror the same debate in psychoanalysis regarding the extent to which chronic shame is indeed socially related. Capps leans decidedly toward the Kohutian emphasis on self structures (alone). Smedes, by contrast, takes seriously the impact of social settings, namely friends and family, in his model for help. Additionally, it must be said that Capps may indeed find Smedes' emphasis on self-acceptance unsatisfying, as he writes that self-mirroring<sup>88</sup> is "a more powerful and dynamic expression of self-love than is acceptance because it involves a positive regard for the other self, one that eschews any note or form of superiority or condescension."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Capps, pp. 162-169.

<sup>88</sup>Mirroring is a term popularized by Kohut. The image is one of an actual mirror, where, when a child is involved in a human act with a human emotion, a corresponding affirming emotion is fed back to the child from the parent who is present and emotionally engaged, just as a mirror feeds back an image which is directed toward it. Kohut used this term in reference to two people, a child and parent; Capps however, coins this concept of self-mirroring, where an individual can manage to carry out some of this mirroring for him/herself, within him/herself.

<sup>89</sup>Capps, pp. 91-92.

Both Smedes' and Capps' models rely at least in part on insight as the agent for change. However, their methods contain behavioral and transformational components. Jeff VanVonderen, by contrast, has developed a model focused entirely on changed attitudes. Writing in *Tired of Trying to Measure Up* VanVonderen writes that at the heart of a shame-based personality is bad theology. That bad theology is one which considers the Christian someone who still has an old self (shame-based; inadequate) in addition to a new self (grace-based; redeemed). VanVonderen writes, "Understanding what it means to be a new creation is central to your recovery process, because God's solution to shame is the new creation."<sup>90</sup>

Neither Smedes, Capps, nor VanVonderen offers a counseling model for chronic shame. Rather each seeks to focus on insights that might be used as resources for self-help. One of the aims for pastoral theology in going forward would appear to be a consideration of counseling models for chronic shame. VanVonderen's model, in addressing only the cognitive, or attitudinal, side of shame, would not be likely to appeal to people who do not resonate to a rational-emotive type response for help. However, the very fact that Smedes has focused on self-acceptance, while Capps has picked out self-trust as a critical area for help, would suggest that their answers may be partial solutions to multi-faceted experiences of chronic shame.

### 3. Shame As an Obstacle to Forgiving

John Patton offers a different perspective on shame than the previous three theologians, speaking not to the problem of chronic shame, but to shame in issues of human forgiveness. In his book *Is Human Forgiveness Possible?*

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<sup>90</sup>Jeff VanVonderen, *Tired of Trying to Measure Up: Getting Free From the Demands, Expectations and Intimidations of Well-Meaning People* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), pp. 122, 121-131.

(1985) Patton argues that overcoming defenses against shame is the key to a person's ability to forgive. Patton's focus on forgiveness emerges from his thirty years of pastoral experience, in which he continuously encountered people experiencing difficulties in forgiving another person. Patton argues that while the offender must deal with issues of guilt, the offended party must overcome the defenses against shame -- defenses of power and rage, and being in the right. Only in letting go of positions of power and in seeing the irrelevance of righteousness (or 'innocence'), can one come to a place of forgiveness, which can only be *discovered*, as opposed to *done*. For Patton, the 'discovery' of forgiveness for an offended party is the discovery that the offended, too, stands in the community of sinners. It is the discovery that the offended is more like, than unlike, the offender. It is accepting one's shame by discovering one's own guilt.<sup>91</sup>

Patton begins by reducing Kaufman's five defenses against shame to two categories, rage and power, and righteousness. For Patton, rage defends against injury to the self, and power against inferiority felt by the self. As for righteousness, or being in the right, Patton cites three manifestations of this defense against shame, namely maintaining one's innocence, blaming other people, and perfectionism (which he sees as an attempt to compensate for an underlying sense of defectiveness).<sup>92</sup>

Patton joins Wurmser and Nathanson in his attention to defenses against shame, but Patton's work moves beyond their work to consider the impact of these defenses on a concrete pastoral situation. Moreover, Patton offers useful distinctions with regard to defenses. For example, Patton discusses the merits of 'rage' as a description of defense, as opposed to the more domesticated 'anger,'

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<sup>91</sup>Patton, pp. 11-16.

<sup>92</sup>Patton, pp. 65-69, 96, 99, 102.

because rage more adequately reflects a person's primitive and irrational response to injury to the self. In assigning issues of shame to the person who must offer forgiveness, and guilt to the person who must be forgiven, Patton may have failed to take into consideration the degree to which the respective emotions may play a part in the reverse roles. As Piers, Lynd, and Lewis all conclude, some people may be pre-disposed to shame or guilt, propensities that presumably may emerge regardless of which role in forgiveness one finds him/herself. Nevertheless, Patton's work is important for this vital area of pastoral care.

### **Conclusion**

In the preceding chapter we first explored the original impetus for pursuing shame studies in pastoral theology, before turning to a review of psychoanalytic, sociological and pastoral theological literature regarding shame.

Compared to psychoanalysis, advances in shame studies in pastoral theology have been relatively few, consisting primarily in Donald Capps' sin construct of shame-related "problematics of the self" and Lewis Smedes' phenomenological insights on varieties of shame experiences. Concerning pastoral responses to shame, a primary issue in psychoanalysis is mirrored in pastoral theology, namely, the extent to which healing chronic shame has social dimensions. Donald Capps, in relying on Heinz Kohut's self psychological theory, seems to prefer a self-care model which includes a social component as a secondary factor. By contrast, Smedes, offering an approach more like that of psychoanalyst Gershen Kaufman, sees both origins of shame and resources for healing shame to reside in human relationships. Neither Capps nor Smedes, however, takes up issues in counseling directly; instead, their pastoral care models are designed for self-help.

Based on writings particularly in psychoanalysis and pastoral theology (but also sociology), one of the leading areas for future exploration in shame studies would appear to be the extent to which, and how, social structures join psychological structures in creating chronic shame. For pastoral caregivers involved in churches, church and theological contexts would appear to be vital areas of interest. Moreover, it would seem useful to continue considerations of how pastoral responses to shame can be theologically informed. Some of the conceptual territory about which psychoanalysts have concerned themselves regarding shame, such as failure and estrangement, have long theological traditions in the church as well. Finally, it would seem that all research might best be aimed ultimately at how chronic shame might be discharged.

We turn next in Chapter Two to consider a research approach which might effectively take up these and other questions related to a pastoral theological response to chronic shame.



Research Methodology

**Introduction**

In Chapter One we outlined some personal motivations behind this research project, noting the aim to advance pastoral theological perspectives on shame. Next, we undertook a review of relevant literature in the social sciences and in pastoral theology.

Now in Chapter Two we turn to a discussion of the research approach. Based on a review of the literature, it was decided that a primary aim of this research would be to consider interviewees' experiences of shame within social context, particularly the church. Moreover, it was decided to pursue a qualitative research method toward that end.

Accordingly, this chapter is arranged in three sections. In the first section we provide the research set up, including a description of research aims, pastoral theological method and qualitative research approach. In the second section of this chapter, we turn to the conducting of the research, consisting in interviews of parishioners in two Presbyterian Churches in the United States. In this section we show how the research sites were selected, along with how the interviews were designed and conducted. In the third section, we seek to show how the interview results were described, analyzed and evaluated. Notably, this section includes a discussion of the decision made to focus on chronic shame experiences. Also, it provides a discussion of analytic criteria used to distinguish shame from guilt.

## **I. Setting Up the Research**

The following section discusses the research aim, along with the pastoral theological method and qualitative research approach. Concerning pastoral theological method, a dialogical approach is employed, aimed at considering insights both from interviewees' empirical context and from their Christian tradition in developing pastoral theological perspectives on shame. As it concerns qualitative research approach, a grounded theory style will be pursued.

### **A. Research Aim -- Pastoral Theological Perspectives on Shame**

The literature review revealed one area in particular for further study. Namely, although psychoanalytic theories of shame are growing rapidly, comparatively few advances have been made in considering shame dynamics within their social contexts, particularly theology and the church. Along these lines, it would also appear significant to explore the relationship between social norms and apparent psychic structures in creating peoples' shame experiences. These and other findings would appear to offer the potential for useful advances in knowledge in developing pastoral theological responses to modern-day experiences of shame.

Wayne Oates writes that "counseling becomes *pastoral* when the counselee or the counselor focuses the relationship upon the relation of God to the process of their lives." Oates goes on to say that this awareness of God as reality shapes the counseling process in several ways. Namely, it informs counseling aims and conversation; it provides counseling resources from religious tradition; and it provides a church community as the context for counseling. In short, for Oates, what makes counseling pastoral is the

theological *framework* guiding and informing the counseling process.<sup>1</sup>

David Lyall has cautioned that with Oates' approach to counseling, a counselor may mistakenly assume that a counselee's own internal frame of reference includes God, when it does not.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a pastor would need to be sensitive to the possibility of negative associations a counselee may have with God (and pastors and the church), which may cause explicit mention of God in counseling to interfere with growth and healing. However, bearing in mind these and other cautions for the application of Oates' approach, an aim that pastoral practice with shame be theologically informed motivates the consideration of peoples' shame experiences within the context of theology and the church.

Just how one considers counseling issues within the context of theology and the church has been a matter of debate in counseling circles. For example, Don Browning has argued that theological integration should focus on theological ethics. Thomas Oden has taken an historical approach, seeking to draw on the writings of the church fathers in order to inform pastoral practice.<sup>3</sup> While a number of approaches might have been chosen, this thesis will use as its ecclesial and theological context that of the Reformed tradition. Because the Reformed tradition is that of interviewees' churches, this approach has the effect of

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<sup>1</sup>Wayne Oates, *Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 11-20.

<sup>2</sup>David Lyall, *Counselling in the Pastoral and Spiritual Context*, *Counselling in Context* series, eds. Moira Walker and Michael Jacobs (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1995), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>For Don Browning's work, see *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care and Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care*, *Theology and Pastoral Care Series*, Don Browning, series ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). For Thomas Oden's work, see *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*, *Theology and Pastoral Care Series*, series ed. Don S. Browning (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1984 and *Pastoral Counsel*, *Classical Pastoral Care Series*, vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989).



linking the theological reflection directly to the empirical context. Moreover, focusing on one tradition would appear to offer an opportunity for a pastoral theological response to shame which is more deeply rooted in one tradition, before turning to other traditions for added richness.

## **B. Significance of This Study**

This research would appear to be significant for several reasons. First, this thesis aims to reflect on pastoral-theological approach for a problem reckoned to be of growing proportions in American society, including the American church. Moreover, this problem has been met with few pastoral-theological responses to-date, particularly those which are empirically grounded.

In particular, this research aims to reflect on parishioners' experiences of shame according to their own words and meanings, considered in church and theological context. With most of the recent literature in shame written by psychoanalysts, both the words and the meanings behind them have been supplied by social scientists. This research aims to reflect on the words and meanings of everyday (church) people. Moreover, reflecting on these meanings in church and theological context looks ahead to ways that responses to shame can be theologically informed, and parish-based.

Any study has limitations. This study was conducted in an American context in two small subgroups of that America. This study was also limited to one Protestant denomination (Presbyterianism). While pursuing this research in defined social contexts about which we have information ultimately strengthens the research results, like any qualitative study, the extent to which results are applicable outside

of that context is up to the judgement of individual readers. Nevertheless, as an American Presbyterian pursuing the research in this context not only capitalized on the context I know best, but likely provides results with some application to other Protestant denominations and other Western societies.

### **C. Pastoral Theological Method -- A Dialogical Approach**

Bearing in mind the research objective to advance pastoral-theological responses to shame, reflection on pastoral-theological research method is the first step.

Alastair Campbell has proposed a pastoral-theological method set between two pre-existing poles. On the one hand, Campbell points to the implied theory behind the pastoral method of Eduard Thurneysen. Campbell notes that Thurneysen's method is concerned with the "specific communication to the individual of the message proclaimed in general in the sermon to the congregation." In short, Thurneysen's view of practical theology is based on a proclamation model, where theological practice is deduced from the Word of God proclaimed.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Campbell points to the theory behind Seward Hiltner's method for practical theology. Under the influence of Rogerian client-centered therapy, Hiltner has understood pastoral theology as

...that branch or field of theological knowledge and enquiry that brings the shepherding perspective to bear upon all the operations and functions of the church and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a

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<sup>4</sup>Alastair Campbell, "The Nature of Practical Theology" *Theology and Practice*, ed. Duncan Forrester (London: Epworth Press, 1990), p. 13. Taken from Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, trans. J. A. Worthington and Thomas Wieser (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1962).

theological order from reflection on these observations.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to Thurneysen's deductive method, Hiltner begins with experience and moves from there to make inductive observations about theology.

Campbell finds both extremes unsatisfactory. He finds Thurneysen's approach limiting and Hiltner's approach theologically ungrounded. For Campbell, the answer lies in aiming at the strengths of both extremes. He writes:

The relationship between practical theology and the other theological disciplines is *neither inductive* (cf. Hiltner), *nor deductive* (cf. Thurneysen). The relationship is to be seen as a 'lateral' rather than a 'linear' one. Practical theology juxtaposes concrete situations of witness, celebration and service with the findings and formulations of the biblical, historical and philosophical subjects in the theological corpus. It does this not in order to correct according to some canon of relevance, nor in order to be corrected according to some canon of orthodoxy. It is more an exercise in creative imagination, the interplay of idea and action, with all the ambiguity and inconclusiveness which this implies.<sup>6</sup>

Part of the appeal of Campbell's dialogical approach is in the flexibility inherent in this "exercise in creative imagination." Within these parameters, pastoral theologians of varying orientations can find the room to creatively practice the art of pastoral theology within their own traditions.

As a conservative Reformed theologian, my own approach may be seen to be weighted a bit more toward the 'tradition' side than pastoral theologians with other theological backgrounds. Nevertheless, before turning to 'how' to respond pastorally, we must turn first to the 'what' is to be found concerning peoples' experiences with shame, in

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 14. Taken from Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), p. 20.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 18



theological and church context. Toward this end, we turn next to a brief description of the qualitative research method which will be employed in this research.

#### D. Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative analysis is an expanding and diverse field. Renata Tesch, in an attempt to survey the field, names forty-six separate approaches to qualitative analysis and concludes, "The only agreement we would find among qualitative researchers is that analysis is the process of making sense of narrative data."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Tesch notes that all qualitative research has three basic interests, namely: 1.) the characteristics of language, 2.) the discovery of regularities (identification and categorization of elements, and exploration of their connections) and discerning patterns; and 3.) the comprehension of the meaning of text/action.<sup>8</sup> Tesch goes on to suggest that each approach typically emphasizes one of these three interests.

Given the growing approaches from which to choose, some researchers opt for an eclectic approach. Patrick McNeill writes that "most researchers would now accept that it is sensible to use a mixture of methods, and to use the strengths of one method to compensate for the weaknesses of another in the overall research design."<sup>9</sup> In the tradition of McNeill and others like him, this thesis is designed using an eclectic approach. Nevertheless, it will be

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<sup>7</sup>Renata Tesch, *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools* (London: The Falmer Press, 1990), p. 4. Different 'brands' of qualitative research listed by Tesch include ethnography, focus group research, participant observation, symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis, ethnomethodology, and phenomenology, to name a few (Tesch, pp. 57-58).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-94.

<sup>9</sup>Patrick McNeill, *Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 122.

shaped heavily by one of the longer standing approaches to qualitative research, namely grounded theory.

## 1. Grounded Theory

The main proponent of grounded theory has been Anselm Strauss, and the development of this theory is found in three books, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), co-authored with Barney Glaser, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987), and *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990), co-authored with Juliet Corbin. While a sound understanding of grounded theory is believed essential to this research, only brief details of the theory will be provided here. Relevant portions of the theory will also be discussed in Part Three of this chapter and in the introductions to Chapters Three - Five.

The best summary I have seen of grounded theory is provided by Tesch. Tesch begins by writing that generating theory by the grounded theory style begins with the "coding" of raw empirical data into "categories." She goes on to write:

Such categories may be derived from existing theories, but that procedure is tolerated more than it is encouraged (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.. 45/46). In fact, the entire point of theory construction is 'to produce concepts that seem to fit the data' (Strauss, 1987, p. 28). These concepts are provisional at first. They are developed in a process called 'open coding' (*ibid.*), in which the analyst looks at the data line by line for 'empirical indicators,' consisting of 'behavioral actions and events, observed and described in documents and in the words of interviewees and informants' (*ibid.*, p. 25). S/he 'asks of the data a set of questions (*ibid.*, p. 30), one of which is, 'What category does this incident indicate?' (*ibid.*). a provisional code name is given to that category, and codes proliferate quickly.... Once the researcher has become sure of a category, s/he may engage in 'axial coding,' which 'consists of intense analysis done around one category at a time.... This results in

cumulative knowledge about relationships between that category and other categories and subcategories' (*ibid.*). Using specific criteria, the analyst eventually chooses one or more categories as the 'core' categories. At this point, 'selective' coding begins, i.e., 'the analyst delimits coding of only those codes that relate to the core codes in sufficiently significant ways as to be used in a parsimonious theory' (*ibid.*, p. 33).<sup>10</sup>

Tesch's commentary attempts to summarize a complex process. While this will suffice for the time being as an introduction to the approach, specific components of grounded theory will be discussed as they are applied throughout the remaining chapters.

As suggested by Tesch, different styles of qualitative research have different strengths. The strength of grounded theory is data analysis (as opposed to data collection or data description, for example). Therefore, for the descriptive and evaluative (and even analytic phases) of this research, the work of Harry Wolcott and other theorists will be considered.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the emphasis in grounded theory on organizing all research data around a single core category has been suggested by some theorists to be unhelpfully restrictive. Nevertheless, the analytic tools of this method, including its emphasis on comparison and dimensionalizing, serves as a proven method for the analytic phase of this research.

## **2. Claims of Research Representativeness**

Sociologist Rom Harre, in his book *Social Being* (1979), discusses the advantages and disadvantages of both intensive and extensive interviews (terms coined by Harre). Harre notes that with an extensive design, one examines some available subset which is thought to be a

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<sup>10</sup>Tesch, pp. 85-86.

<sup>11</sup>See Harry F. Wolcott, *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994)

representative sample of the population under study, and then one derives the type (of that population) by some sort of averaging procedure on the properties of the members (s)he has examined. The advantage here is that one is guaranteed some result, "however trivial" (says Harre), since some suitable sample of members of the population has been investigated. However, Harre cautions that "if the individuals which constitute the extension of the class are very variable in their characteristics, the results of the investigation are likely to be trivial since there will be few properties in common to all members of the extension of the class."<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, an intensive design aims to examine a typical member so as to discover all, or as many as is practicable, of the properties that that typical member has. The extension of the class is all members who are like this typical member in relevant respects. The danger of this approach, says Harre, is that the member under study is not typical of the class in which the researcher is interested. However, this obstacle can be overcome by analytically defining the class as that set of individuals who are typified by the member under study; in this way, the danger is only that that class may turn out to be very small and the discovery trivial.<sup>13</sup>

The thesis is designed as an intensive study. Therefore, the shame experiences presented in this thesis do not purport to represent experiences of all Americans, all Presbyterians, or any other such externally defined social group; rather, they represent those experiences of people having the types of shame experiences described. However, a careful effort was made to gain some diversity in terms of age and theological position. Moreover, equal numbers

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<sup>12</sup>Rom Harre, *Social Being: A Theory for Social Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 133.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

of men and women were to be interviewed, incorporating ethnic diversity, if possible. In all, 24 interviews were planned.

### **3. Guiding Hypothesis**

Because shame prompts hiding, there may be a significant relationship between shame and confession of sin. Discovering more about shame in relation to these and other pastoral-theological issues should lead to pastoral-theological formulations and responses to shame.

### **4. Research Questions**

The research questions sought to address parishioners' experiences of shame, sin and confession and relationships between those experiences. Therefore, the research questions may be summed up in terms of the following:

- 1.) Does the interviewee resonate with experiences of shame? If so, what are those experiences and what are they like?
- 2.) How does the interviewee experience sin, and is shame a part of that experience?
- 3.) How has the interviewee handled confession of experiences of shame and sin?

At this point will turn to a discussion of how the research was conducted.

## **II. Conducting the Research**

In the previous section, theoretical concepts guiding the research were presented in brief form, allowing for a more detailed description of how the research was actually conducted. In the following section we will explore how the two Presbyterian Church sites were selected, along with how the interviews themselves were designed and conducted.

## **A. Site Selection**

Two churches were selected as the primary pools from which to draw potential interviewees. One was theologically liberal and the other conservative. This sections aims to explain how the churches were selected and to provide an introduction to the churches.

### **1. Aim**

The aim in site selection was to locate two congregations differing in stated theological position (and sociological characteristics, if possible). Again, it was decided that both churches would be Presbyterian, which would lend some broad continuity of religious heritage of sin and confession among interviewees. Also, Presbyterian churches were plentiful in the area in which I lived, and I am a Presbyterian, which enabled me to bring some Presbyterian experience and knowledge to the interview setting.

### **2. Sources of Help**

While supporting the merits of opportunistic sampling, social science researcher John Honigmann cautions that non-probability sampling is most likely to be successful when informed by expert knowledge in selecting the cite.<sup>14</sup> The two churches chosen were located with aid from several sources. First, I consulted the field placement office at a local seminary, an office which maintains a relationship with most area churches for placement of student interns. Secondly, I talked to students and townspeople whom I got to know in the early weeks of my stay in this town. Lastly, the head of the Sociology of Religion Department at

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<sup>14</sup>John J. Honigmann, "Sampling in Ethnographic Fieldwork," *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*, ed. Robert G. Burgess (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp. 80-83.



a local university confirmed the churches as the two best choices for Presbyterian church theological diversity by recounting that several years ago, the respective pastors of these churches had debated each other publicly through the media over several theological issues.

### **3. The Two Churches Described**

Of the two churches selected, one was (using pseudonyms) "Uptown Presbyterian," a church of 800 members and part of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (the "mainline" Presbyterian denomination in the U.S.). The second church was "Fringes Presbyterian," a church of about 250 members and part of the Presbyterian Church of America (one of the larger of the conservative denominations which have divided from the mainline church).

Uptown Presbyterian stands in the center of "Societyville," with its property adjacent to the front gates of the prestigious town University. Although its church building is modest in size by comparison, both structures serve as focal points for the center of town. Symbolically, Uptown Presbyterian stands not only in the center of town but at the center of the intellectualism and progressive thinking in which this University town prides itself.

The two pastors of Uptown Presbyterian emphasized in preaching and teaching the liberal agenda of working for equal power and voice for all ethnic groups, for both genders and for people of various sexual persuasions. Tolerance, inclusivity and compassion were valued and one's piety was expressed through working for social change. Many university and seminary professors attend this church, and its upper middle class congregation, possibly more than any other congregation in the area, reflects the academic and commercial wealth of this community; a number of congregation members had advanced university degrees. A

typical slate of Sunday School classes, on a given Sunday morning, would resemble the following: university professor lecturing on the place of the church in society; seminary professor emeritus lecturing on church history; and a visiting United Nations diplomat lecturing on the state of the former Soviet Union.

Symbolism concerning Fringes Presbyterian Church is equally strong. In particular, Fringes Presbyterian appears to stand for everything that Uptown Presbyterian does not. Although the churches are only four miles apart, Fringes Presbyterian stands on the outskirts of town, on the edge of a large tract of farmland, with only a few houses visible on the some 100 acres of surrounding undeveloped land. The church was 'planted' by its existing pastor approximately ten years ago, with an aim to bring an evangelical, biblical witness to the area. No professors from the seminary or university attend the church, and few members hold advanced degrees (some have no university training at all).

The pastor supports the conservative agenda of evangelistic zeal and separation from the world; self-denial and self-discipline were valued. Personal piety was expressed through daily devotional times of prayer and Bible-reading, growth in one's relationship to God, and one's moral virtues. Church-members were mainly middle-class, with some people lower middle-class. Typical Sunday School offerings were: a layman teaching a class on the book of John; a layman showing a videotape series of a noted evangelical teacher; a layman leading a class on the history of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in America in the early 20th century.

While theological and socioeconomic diversity were evident in both churches, there was limited ethnic diversity, which reflects the surrounding area. Most members at both

churches were Caucasians, with the exceptions typically being internationals from the academic communities in the region. The town of "Societyville" itself consisted of about 25,000 people, with a city of 100,000 people about twenty miles south and many small towns scattered all around. While Societyville is a self-contained town, it also functions to some degree as a 'bedroom community' for commuters into two large metropolitan areas. In this way, both churches are neither particularly rural, nor urban, avoiding an extreme from this standpoint.

## **B. Entry and Establishment on Site**

Once I had selected the churches, two important issues concerned how I would manage my involvement in two churches at one time, and secondly how I would manage my role as researcher.

### **1. Involvement in the Churches**

By early September, 1991, Uptown and Fringes Presbyterian churches had been selected, and I was ready to begin work on site. In an effort to meet people quickly, I spent from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. virtually every Sunday morning split between worship services and Sunday school hours at both churches. Normally, this consisted of an 8:30 Bible study and a 9:30 worship service at Uptown Presbyterian Church and a 11:00 worship service at Fringes Presbyterian Church. Additionally, at Fringes Presbyterian I was involved in a weekly Bible study and fellowship meeting; worked in the nursery every other month; went to the Men's Fellowship monthly Saturday morning meetings; organized and attended weekly basketball gatherings for the men; participated in many fellowship dinners; went to the sanctuary decorating evening at Christmastime; and attended a missions meeting.

At Uptown Presbyterian Church I was very involved in a start-up singles ministry, taking part in monthly meetings, and later additional planning meetings (as I moved into a leadership role in this group). I worked alongside other church members monthly throughout the year (for three hours) at a local soup kitchen; participated in two book club meetings; went to many fellowship events and several meetings of a group on spirituality; went Christmas caroling to homes of shut-ins; and attended a Sunday night vespers service, several committee meetings, and several sessions of packaging food for the homeless. Although my general course of action was to become active in as many events as possible, I soon focused upon small group situations, where interaction with other people enabled friendships to develop more quickly.

Additionally, through friendships developed at the churches, I was involved in many non-church activities with churchpeople, including eating many meals together, providing baby-sitting, attending sporting events and movies, and going on a shopping trip and two weekend church retreats. Also, as my accommodation in the area, I lived for three months with a church couple from Fringes Presbyterian, and for nine months with the aunt of a church-member from Uptown Presbyterian.

## **2. Management of role**

Marshall and Rossman discuss devising a researcher's role to "elicit cooperation, trust, openness and acceptance."<sup>15</sup> My intent was to position myself as a parishioner, not a minister in training. I suspected that being viewed as part of the clergy might erect a barrier to openness, possibly causing potential interviewees to fear that I as a minister was more righteous and either would not relate

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<sup>15</sup>Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1989), p. 65.

well to their failings or would judge them. In short, I simply began developing friendships with as many people as I could.

### **C. Interview Design**

The research design called for in-depth interviews of twenty-four people, approximately twelve each from Uptown and Fringes Presbyterian churches. This number was expected to provide at least as much empirical data as could be usefully interpreted. As Marshall and Rossman warn, a disadvantage of in-depth interviews is that it often produces volumes of data, which is not easily manipulated.<sup>16</sup>

#### **1. Type of Interview -- In-Depth, Unscheduled**

The empirical data for this thesis was to be gathered using in-depth, unscheduled interviews. Unscheduled interviews are ones where the interviewer knows categories of information desired, but where the wording and sequence of questions are varied according to the unique unfolding of each interview. Unscheduled interviews are contrasted to scheduled interviews, where questions proceed with the same wording, in the same order, without variation, for each respondent.

Unscheduled interviews have the advantage of allowing the phenomena under study to unfold according to the interviewee's, not the interviewer's, view of the phenomena, a feature Marshall and Rossman call "an assumption fundamental to qualitative research."<sup>17</sup> Also, unscheduled interviews are favored particularly when

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 82

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

sensitive and complex information is sought from the interviewer, such as in the case of the present research on shame. Scheduled interviews are favored when the same information is desired from all respondents, such as in the case of a census bureau survey.

As for disadvantages of unscheduled interviews, Marshall and Rossman caution that unscheduled interviews are less reliable than scheduled interviews.<sup>18</sup> That is, unscheduled interviews are said to be more vulnerable to an interviewer's consciously or unconsciously varying his/her wording and nonverbal communication to elicit the 'desired' answer. In the present research, the research objective is rather open-ended, resulting in no pre-conceived answers which would create bias. Therefore, I aimed simply to avoid asking leading questions, and otherwise monitored my influence on the process seeking to create an atmosphere where the interviewee could freely share his/her own ideas.

## **2. Interview Questions (Gaining Access to Interviewees' Experiences of Shame)**

As stated earlier, the research questions sought to access interviewees' experiences of shame and sin. Because in-depth unscheduled interviews were planned, there were no pre-set interview questions. The interview plan was to seek a mutual interchange of ideas. I would break the ice by sharing a shame experience or two of my own, and then I would seek to guide interviewees to issues of shame and sin as the interview unfolded.

Four practice interviews revealed that many people were hesitant to share shame experiences. Their hesitancy was not unexpected since my research objective was to ask interviewees to share experiences which they are motivated to hide, as is the nature of shame. As Schneider writes,

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 83.



the exposure of that for which one feels shame is painful, and asking people to re-expose shameful experiences only promised more pain for them.<sup>19</sup> The primary plan for overcoming this obstacle was to practice mutual disclosure and pastoral compassion.

Concerning mutual disclosure, I hoped that my vulnerability as the interviewer would create an environment where vulnerability was felt by the interviewee not as one-sided, but shared, and therefore more easily risked. Ann Oakley, in her article in *Doing Feminist Research* challenges traditional interviewing as hierarchical, where the interviewee is subordinate and passive, adapting to the situation and role set by the interviewer, who remains in a position of relative power, withholding her/his own views or experiences on the topics at hand. Oakley argues that hierarchical interviewing is exploitative and unhelpful in building rapport with the interviewee.<sup>20</sup>

In its place Oakley suggests a feminist 'interactive' model, as described in Laslett and Rapoport's paper "Collaborative Interviewing and Interactive Research" (1975). Laslett and Rapoport conclude that because such an approach enhances the interviewer/interviewee relationship, then information in greater depth is acquired when the interviewer is "being responsive to, rather than seeking to avoid, respondent reactions to the interview situation and experience." The principle of a hierarchical relationship

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<sup>19</sup>Carl Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), p. 22.

<sup>20</sup>Ann Oakley, "Interviewing Women," *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. Helen Roberts (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 30-38.

Oakley acknowledges the risk of bias (pp. 30-38). However, she concludes that the 'proper' interview and the perfect interviewer are impossible, noting the comment of Sellitz, et al (1965) that "Much of what we call interviewer bias can more correctly be described as interviewer differences, which are inherent in the fact that interviewers are human beings and not machines and that they do not work identically." (p. 52).

between interviewer and interviewee is not adhered to and "an attempt is made to generate a collaborative approach to the research which engages both the interviewer and respondent in a joint enterprise."<sup>21</sup> The approach to interviews in the present research is modeled upon this non-hierarchical interactionist model.

Second, the plan was for me to respond with pastoral compassion and empathy during interviews, which not only communicated a valuing of the interviewee's experience, but possibly comforted the interviewee in the experience of re-exposing. Hopefully too, there might be some catharsis for the interviewee in sharing, although the extent to which such benefit would occur was expected to be minimal. Therefore, the interview plan was to strive to maintain a delicate balance throughout the interviews, between the distance of a researcher and the closeness of a pastor.

### 3. Second-Order Constructs

Sociologist Norman Denzin make a distinction between "first-order" and "second-order concepts" in sociological research. For Denzin, first-order concepts are those of the language of everyday life, while second-order concepts are abstract and sociological in nature. As a result, researchers "must operate between multiple worlds when engaging in research -- the everyday worlds of the subjects and the world of his or her own sociological perspective." Denzin goes on to write, "An irreducible conflict will always exist between the sociological perspective and the perspective of everyday life (Becker, 1964)."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 44. Taken from B. Laslett and R. Rapoport, "Collaborative Interviewing and Interactive Research," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (November, 1975), p. 968. Oakley cites not only her own work in interviewing women, but the work of Zweig (1949), Corbin (1971), Mamak (1978) and Hobson (1978) in support of her approach (1981, pp. 51-58).

<sup>22</sup>Norman Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 2nd ed. (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), pp. 10-11.

In United States culture, 'shame' language cannot be considered language of everyday life. As the literature review in Chapter One suggests, 'shame' has emerged as a concept distinct from 'guilt' only in the last several decades, and its awareness is limited primarily to psychoanalytic realms of thought. Consequently, I did not expect the average church-person to converse easily about shame, especially according to the description which has emerged in psychoanalytic literature. Therefore, although interviewees often used the word 'shame' in their everyday language descriptions, I was primarily interested in identifying shame experiences according to the descriptions found in psychoanalytic literature. Once identified, I was then interested in how these experiences unfolded and were expressed by interviewees. In this way, 'shame' remained primarily a second-order, rather than a first-order construct in the interview research.

#### **4. Ethics in Design**

Ethical concerns considered prior to the interviews included confidentiality. All interviews were to be tape recorded (with the interviewee's prior permission). However, anonymity was promised to the interviewees, in that the results would be shared with other people (especially in the written thesis) only under pseudonyms for names and other demographic detail.

#### **5. Training of the Interviewer**

At the University of Edinburgh, I took four seminar courses or workshops in social science research methods, two involving an overview of different methods available (primarily participant observation, interviewing and questionnaires) and issues in doing qualitative research, and two involving interview methods specifically. The

first interview methods course also included a practical component, where each classmember performed taped, one-hour interviews of another classmember, discussing problems in the process afterwards. The second course was a workshop which met for six, two-hour sessions where each classmember took turns completing video-taped interviews of other classmembers, for critique and discussion afterwards. Readings in social science research, interviewing methods in particular, supplemented this seminar work.

#### **D. Conducting the Interviews**

Thirty interviews were conducted January - August, 1992. Although this research is not quantitative, it is worth noting that approximately three-quarters of interviewees located at least one shame experience for discussion. The first interview took place in late January, 1992, approximately five months after my entry onto the two church sites, and several interviews took place in the succeeding months. However, the bulk of the interviews occurred after at least eight months on site (beginning in May, 1992), as I sensed prior to that time that my relationship with potential interviewees had not yet developed enough to sustain revealing issues of shame. However, in the end, thirty interviews were completed between late January and August, 1992.

#### **1. Selection of Interviewees**

Selection of interviewees was guided by my sense of the trust level I developed with people, by my sense of their ability to talk about their inner world, and by my aim to locate a sample of varying age, sex, and cultural backgrounds. I learned after encountering some initial resistance to the topic of shame that establishing trust was essential, which sometimes meant not only waiting until

my friendship with the potential interviewee had grown, but waiting several weeks after initially mentioning the possibility of an interview, to arrange a time to actually meet.

## **2. Interviewee Profile**

Ten people from Uptown Presbyterian Church were interviewed and nine people from Fringes Presbyterian church. At Uptown Presbyterian, five interviewees were women and five were men, with ages spanning from mid-thirties to mid-sixties. Also, there were two racial-ethnic minorities represented. At Fringes Presbyterian, six interviewees were men and three were women. Ages spanned mid-twenties to mid-sixties, and there were no racial-ethnic minorities represented. The targeted goal of twenty-four interviewees from the two churches was not reached because there was no one else with whom I deemed my relationship strong enough to sustain an interview. That is, I interviewed all churchpeople with whom I felt a sufficient trust level had developed to sustain the interview.

Additionally, the interview population was expanded to include five people from a local seminary population where I was also involved, and six people from two local AIDS support groups. The decision was made to expand the population under the counsel of colleagues in a sociology of religion workshop in which I was involved, for two reasons. First, my interest was qualitative; I never intended my findings to purport to represent a certain church population. Although I wished to use the congregational contexts to enhance interpretation of data, at the time the decision was made, familial and wider societal contexts appeared to be more influential in shaping peoples' shame experiences than did the church contexts. Therefore, when a few people in the seminary population approached me to talk about shame (suggesting to

me they might be reflective interviewees), and as I considered the opportunities with a local AIDS support group, I reasoned that the wider base of experiences could only strengthen my data. Also, I thought it could only help to collect the data. Later on a decision could be made as to whether or not to include it in the interpretation of results.

In the end, in an effort to be able to consider all interviewees in their Reformed church setting, I did not consider texts of interviewees from the AIDS groups.

### **3. The Interview Event**

Interviews typically lasted at least 1 1/2 hours (several were over two hours), and all were tape recorded for verbatim transcription. I began each interview providing some details about my Ph.D. research, i.e, that I am studying shame in hopes of arriving at pastoral-theological perspectives on shame. I then shared a shame experience or two of my own, hoping to help the interviewee begin to distinguish shame from guilt and hoping to build some trust by taking the lead in sharing some vulnerable feelings.

Interviewees often reacted to my initial sharing by relating something that resonated in their own experience with something I had shared. Interviews simply unfolded uniquely from this point, as I gently asked questions surrounding sin and shame. Typical questions included, "How do you know when you have sinned?" or "What is your sense of sin?". Additionally, questions like, "Do other members of your church know the real you?" or "What would it be like if other church members knew everything about you, your deepest, darkest secrets?" also proved the type of questions which were helpful.



#### **4. Interviewees' Negotiation of What They Would Share**

I observed interviewees' use of various strategies in deciding what shame experiences to share and how to share them. I sensed that some interviewees appeared to veil the specifically shameful part of their stories in non-specific language. For example, some people shared of sexual impropriety, without disclosing what that impropriety was. In eliminating the specifically shameful component of the story, interviewees appeared to be able to share shame experiences while minimizing the pain of re-exposure to me. Also, several interviewees shared events which happened long ago, sometimes during childhood. It is likely that such distance in time enabled them to avoid the pain of re-experiencing shame. One would suspect that at the end of the day, interviewees did not share all shame experiences which came to mind during our interviews. More than likely they were constantly negotiating what they were willing to share and in what manner they would share it.

#### **5. Interviewing Ethics**

As I began the interviews, a chief ethical issue which emerged was how to guard against 'raiding the inner temple' of interviewees, which could be potentially painful for them, leaving them with a sense of having been violated. I sensed that many interviewees were trusting that I would not put them in a place of sharing something they wished later they had not shared. I had sensed this factor in the four practice interviews, but it emerged as increasingly important as the interviews progressed.

One strategy to avoid violating the interviewees was to expose myself also, through mutual sharing, relieving the pain of isolation that interviewees encountered in exposure. However, I came to conclude that it was more

important to be extremely sensitive to cues from interviewees about when I was pressing too close to an issue. For example, when an interviewee shared a shame experience, but chose not to reveal details about that which was shaming for him/her, I did not press for those details. This was the primary arena in which I was called to balance the compassion of a pastor with the investigative drive of a researcher.

As a separate note, I had suspected going into the interviews that my promise of disappearing (back to Scotland) some months after the interview, with no intention to return, may have enhanced the interviewees' willingness to share. As it turned out, I have no reason to believe that this factor ever aided the interview process. In fact, my sense was that the shared vulnerability made the interviewees feel closer to me, and therefore simply increased the likelihood we would want to remain friends.

## **6. Consideration of Follow-up Interviews**

I considered doing follow-up interviews with some people, hoping to unpack meanings of words shared in the first interview, or gathering interviewees' further reflections. However, this idea was abandoned. Interviewees who shared experiences with a high shame component experienced the pain of re-exposure in the interviews. Several people suggested explicitly or implicitly that the interview had not been particularly enjoyable. I determined that those people with whom a follow-up interview would be most helpful -- i.e., people who experienced shame -- would be least likely to want to give me another evening of their time for another unpleasant experience. More than likely those people sharing experiences with predominant guilt content experienced the interviews as cathartic, while those feeling shame experienced little or no catharsis.

I did try one follow-up interview. It appeared difficult for the interviewee to access the experiences of shame shared in-depth during the first interview to answer discrete questions, without fully immersing him/herself in the event again. In general, the trusting aura created in the freshness of the interview the first time around was difficult to re-create the second time. Finally, the interviews had an amorphous quality to them as I fished around for peoples' experiences of shame in an unscientific manner. The lack of structure made it difficult to re-access the interviews' experience of these events.

## **7. Interview Transcription**

Verbatim interview transcriptions were completed for twenty-four of the thirty total interviews. The seven interviews tapes which were not transcribed were those of people who shared no particular feelings of shame. Suspected reasons for the absence of shared shame experiences in these seven interviews are that some people had no conscious resonance with the feeling; some were not really conversant in feeling language; and some were unwilling to share shame resonances. Transcription took, on average, about 10 hours per interview.

## **III. Analyzing and Presenting the Results**

Having considered how the research was designed and conducted, we now turn to the description, analysis and evaluation of the results. Of particular note was the decision to focus the analysis on experiences of interviewees who suffered from chronic shame.

## **A. Focus on Chronic Shame**

The interview results discussed in this thesis focus on interviewees' experiences of chronic shame. Prior to undertaking the research, a guiding aim was to explore the relationships between sin, confession and shame. After the results were gathered, because the richest component of the research results appeared to consist in experiences of chronic shame sufferers, the analysis was limited to experiences of these interviewees.

The group of interviewees who described shame of a chronic nature does not constitute a majority of all interviewees. In fact interviewees' suffering from a chronic type experience of shame amounted to seven of the thirty interviewees. However, the shame experiences shared by this group does constitute a sizeable, if not a majority, of all cases of shame shared. Moreover, non-chronic shame experiences can be used to provide comparisons and contrasts with experiences of chronic shame.

## **B. Description and Analysis (Chs. 3-5)**

The following section details the theory underpinning the description and analysis in Chapters Three - Five. Additionally, a discussion is provided for distinguishing shame from guilt.

### **1. Discussion of Theory**

Chapters Three, Four and Five are comprised of description and analysis of interviewees' experiences of chronic shame. While these two terms may appear to be self-explanatory, a word about their meanings as it pertains to qualitative research may help. Harry Wolcott writes of three possible emphases in conducting qualitative research, namely, description, analysis and interpretation. For Wolcott,

description answers the question, "What is going on here?", while analysis identifies essential features in the data and interrelationships between them, and interpretation concludes with "What is to be made of it all?"<sup>23</sup>

This thesis aims to provide description, analysis and interpretation of chronic shame. First, a word about description. As described in Chapter One, because shame involves deep, elusive and complex experiences, description of peoples' experiences remains a fruitful research aim. The descriptive component of this research aims particularly to capture the everyday language of American churchpeople.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the descriptive component aims to capture verisimilitude. Norman Denzin writes, "Thick description creates verisimilitude; that is, truth-like statements that produce for readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described."<sup>25</sup> Particularly because shame is not yet the language of everyday Americans, then there would appear to be considerable opportunities for descriptive accounts of shame to help Americans name their previously unnamed experiences of shame.

Next, we turn to analysis. Of the many styles of qualitative research, grounded theory is known for placing an emphasis on analysis. Key parts of analysis include first, identifying key categories, or themes, emerging from

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<sup>23</sup>Wolcott cautions researchers against an impatience with "mere description" in an effort to move on to analysis and interpretation. For Wolcott, description embodies storytelling, which is at the heart of qualitative research. Wolcott, p. 12.

Readers may note my own preference in this thesis for "evaluation" over Wolcott's term of "interpretation."

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-17.

<sup>25</sup>Norman Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism*, Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol. 16 (London: Sage Publications, 1989), pp. 83-84.

respondents' descriptions, and then exploring dimensions and properties of these categories. Next, the aim is to re-assemble the data in a meaningful way, paying particular attention to the crucial links between the categories.<sup>26</sup>

In sum, Strauss and Corbin characterize grounded theory as a transactional system. They write:

We like to think of grounded theory as a transactional system, a method of analysis that allows one to examine the interactive nature of events. Of all the paradigm features, action and/or interaction lie at the heart of grounded theory..... All phenomena and their related action/interaction are embedded in sets of conditions. Action/interaction also lead to specifiable consequences. These in turn, become part of the relevant conditions that bear upon the next action/interaction sequence.<sup>27</sup>

This focus on the transactional nature of phenomena guides the arrangement of Chapters Three - Five of this thesis. That is, Chapter Three focuses on causes of shame and shame phenomena, which result in preventive strategies against shame (Chapter Four), all of which leads to certain consequences (Chapter Five).

Grounded theory is a proven theory of research in a burgeoning qualitative research field which contains many unproven theories. While grounded theory provides little guidance for doing evaluation, tools for this portion of the research can be gained from Wolcott and other theorists. Saving the bulk of evaluation until Chapter Six enables us to develop an unencumbered "story line" of shame (in Chapters Three - Five).

Finally, it should be said that the categories used to organize interviewees' experience attempt to capture

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<sup>26</sup>Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *The Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 61-74, 96-115, 138-139.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.



significant meanings expressed by interviewees in describing their shame experiences. The selection of these categories does not mean that there are not other useful meanings emerging from the data. However, those presented here are believed to be ones emerging prominently and also providing useful relationships to research already completed in psychotherapeutic and pastoral studies of shame. At the end of the day, it is the testimony of the data itself which serves to authenticate the categories.

Several components were important to the analysis phase of assessing the qualitative data. First, a analytic scheme is needed for isolating shame phenomena, and in particular, distinguishing shame from guilt.

## **2. Distinguishing Shame from Guilt**

As detailed in Chapter One, Helen Lewis is among psychoanalysts who have grouped mortification, humiliation, embarrassment, chagrin, shyness, modesty, and feeling ridiculous and the like as "variants of the shame family." Because these experiences are believed to share essential ingredients of a focus on the self and on exposure and covering, in this thesis we join Lewis in treating all of these experiences as 'shame.'<sup>28</sup>

The primary analytic distinctions which must be drawn, then, concern distinctions between shame and guilt. As outlined in Chapter One, Helen Lewis and Helen M. Lynd made key contributions in distinguishing shame from guilt. Both

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<sup>28</sup>Helen B. Lewis, "Shame and the Narcissistic Personality," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 110. Nathanson joins Lewis in arguing for a "shame family of emotions" (a phrase he borrows from Leon Wurmser). To Lewis' list of emotions in the shame family, Nathanson adds disgrace, dishonor, degradation, debasement, shyness, bashfulness modesty and the experiences of being put down, slighted and thought of as contemptible. Donald Nathanson, "A Timetable for Shame," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 3.

Lewis and Lynd provide considerable detail in distinguishing shame from guilt, and both conclude with tables summarizing those distinctions. Particularly useful portions of those tables are listed here. First, Lewis' distinctions:

<u>Shame</u>	<u>Guilt</u>
<i>Stimulus:</i>	
•Disappointment, defeat, or moral transgression	•Moral transgression
•Deficiency of self	•Event, act, thing for which self responsible
•Involuntary, self unable	•Voluntary, self able
•Encounter with "other"	•Within the self
<i>Conscious content:</i>	
•Painful emotion	•Affect may or may not be present
•Connections to past feelings	•Fewer connections to past feelings
•Many variants of shame feeling	•Guilt feeling is monotonic
•Fewer variations of cognitive content (the self)	•More variations of content - things in the world
•Identity thoughts	•No identity thoughts
<i>Position of self in field:</i>	
•Self passive	•Self active
•Self focal in awareness	•Self not focal in awareness
•Multiple functions of self at the same time	•Self intact, functioning silently
•Vicarious experience of "other's" view of self	•Pity, concern for "other's" suffering
<i>Nature and discharge of hostility:</i>	
•Humiliated fury	•Righteous indignation
<i>Characteristic Defenses:</i>	
•Denial	•Isolation of affect
•Repression of ideas	•Rationalization
•Affirmation of the self	•Reaction formation: good deeds or thoughts
•Affect disorder: depression	•Thought disorder: obsessions and paranoia. <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1971), pp. 90-91.

Lynd's contributions, in contrast to Lewis', rely less on psychiatric and psychological language. Using more everyday language, they are provided as follows:

#### Shame

- Concerned with overall self
- Involves falling short, failure to reach an ideal
- Exposure of the quick of the self, most of all to oneself; exposure of something that can never be hidden in a closet, is in the depths of the earth or in the open sunlight
- Concern about unalterable features of one's body, way of moving, clumsiness, and so on
- Transcending of shame may lead to sense of identity, freedom

#### Guilt

- Concerned with each separate, discrete act
- Involves transgression of a specific code, violation of a specific taboo
- Exposure of a specific misdemeanor, with emphasis on to whom exposed; exposure of something that should be hidden in a closet
- Concern about violation of social codes of cleanliness, politeness and so on
- Surmounting of guilt leads to righteousness.<sup>30</sup>

On the one hand, the considerable detail provided in these tables suggests the complexity of distinguishing shame and guilt. On the other hand, it shows the variety of handles a researcher has for distinguishing the two. Moreover, some common threads emerge which can simplify the process. Drawing from information in the chapter discussions and each author's summary table, three guiding distinctions emerge:

#### **a. Shame and Inadequacy of The Self (Versus Guilt and Actions)**

Central to both writers' distinctions is that shame occurs in relation to the self, while guilt has no such focus, effectively centering upon one's actions.<sup>31</sup> Lewis also

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<sup>30</sup>Helen M. Lynd, *On Shame and the Search For Identity* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1958), pp. 208-209.

<sup>31</sup>Lewis writes that "the self refers to registration of experience as belonging to one's own identity." Lewis' definition of the self focuses on one's experience of 'who one is,' as opposed to 'what one does.' Lewis' mention of "experience" shows that actions (i.e., 'what one does') and

emphasizes that with shame, the self is experienced as deficient, or inadequate in some way, writing that the proximate stimulus for shame is a "deficiency of [the] self," while the proximate stimulus for guilt is an "event, act, thing for which self [is] responsible." Lastly, Lynd writes that while shame is "concerned with [the] overall self," guilt is "concerned with each separate, discrete act."

It is important to note here that while both Lewis and Lynd associate shame with the self and guilt with actions, actions create shame experiences as well as guilt experiences. The critical distinction is that it is not the nature of what happens in one's external world which shapes a shame or guilt experience. Rather, it is the nature of how that event is experienced internally within a given person which creates the experience.

**b. Shame and Exposure to the 'Other'**  
**(Compared to Guilt and Transgression**  
**of Conscience)**

With shame the presence of the eyes of another (i.e., 'the other') -- whether oneself, other people, God, etc. -- creates the experience. In contrast, guilt arises between a person and his/her conscience. Lewis writes that shame is an "encounter with 'other,'" while guilt is "within the self" (self and conscience). Also, Lewis writes that the person experiences the 'other' as "going away, abandoning."<sup>32</sup>

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events are related to the self, but only by how they serve to define one's identity. Another way to conceive of the self is as one's basic experience of being "I" or "me" as distinguished from other people and objects in the physical world. This thesis will share Lewis' definition of the self as a focus on one's identity.

Helen B. Lewis, "Shame and the Narcissistic Personality," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 107.

<sup>32</sup>Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, p. 88.

### c. Defenses: Shame and Denial (Compared to Guilt and Rationalization)

Shame and guilt often may be identified by the respective defenses people employ against them. In the above table, Lewis lists defenses of denial for shame, and rationalization for guilt. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines denial as "3. Refusal to acknowledge a person or thing as having a certain character or certain claims; a disowning, disavowal." Lewis emphasizes the significant link between shame and denial in noting Anna Freud's distinction between denial and repression. Freud's observation was that while denial operates against an external threat, repression operates against an internal one. Since the hostility in shame is usually perceived as coming from outside the self, then denial is a defense frequently employed for shame.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas denial is a characteristic defense for shame, rationalization is a characteristic defense for guilt. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'rationalization' as: "The justification of behavior to make it appear rational or socially acceptable by (subconsciously) ignoring, concealing, or glossing its real motive; an act of making such a justification."<sup>34</sup> In short, denial is a disowning or disavowal while rationalization is a justification

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<sup>33</sup>J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2nd. edition eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., XX vols., 1st edition eds. James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), IV, 456; *The International Dictionary of Psychology* explains the same phenomenon using psychological language: "A defense mechanism in which the EGO refuses to acknowledge unconscious material in the ID, which if acknowledged would cause a painful reaction, like anxiety or guilt." Stuart Sutherland, *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1989), p. 112; Lewis, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>*The Oxford English Dictionary*, XIII, 220; *The International Dictionary of Psychology* provides the following definition for rationalization: "A defence mechanism in which spurious but plausible reasons are produced to explain aspects of one's behavior or feelings, thus disguising the fact that they come from repressed wishes." *The International Dictionary of Psychology*, pp. 364-365.

(while ownership is not denied). Clues for distinguishing the two defense mechanisms may also be found in their cognitive content. Lewis writes that guilt has visible cognitive content, since justifications are made with words, whereas shame is a comparatively wordless state, since denials can occur rather unknowingly, and in any event are characteristically unexpressed.<sup>35</sup>

There are other distinctions suggested by Lewis and Lynd, but none quite so central, nor helpful in distinguishing shame and guilt experiences. In evaluating experiences of interviewees for the presence of shame, I have looked first for the presence of the above characteristics, although I do turn to other facets of the works of Lewis, Lynd and other writers, on a limited basis.

There are times, of course, when distinguishing guilt and shame in a person's experience is difficult, especially, in the case of moral issues, where Lewis writes that shame and guilt are often fused. For example, one can feel guilty for having called into work sick when planning to go out of town with friends, at the same time one can feel ashamed for being the kind of person who would lie like this. However, skillful use of the above clues helps to distinguish the elements of shame and guilt in moral issues. Additionally, the present research task involves identifying where shame is present, not certifying where guilt is absent.

### **C. Evaluation (Ch. 6)**

Evaluation is sometimes seen as the third of three possible emphases for qualitative research studies. As mentioned earlier, the strength of grounded theory is its tools for analysis (emphasis two), more than description or

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<sup>35</sup>Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, pp. 38-39.



evaluation. Nevertheless, evaluation is considered a crucial part of this thesis and is provided in Chapter Six.

The aim of the evaluative phase of this research is to discuss how the results analyzed in Chapters Three to Five can be used to constructively inform and reform pastoral theological responses to chronic shame. Evaluation continues in a dialogical manner between the various disciplines, including continued interaction with the empirical data (in an effort to maintain a grounded approach), at the same time that counseling theory and theology is considered as well.

#### **D. Aids to Interpreting Interview Data Presented**

" " denotes a verbatim record of an interviewee's word or phrase.

' ' denotes words and phrases used colloquially (not related to interviewees' verbatim language).

[brackets] notes of explanation, clarification or correction.

(*italics*) notes describing action occurring during the interview (such as a laugh or smile, or voice tone), although not a part of the interview dialogue.

"...." a portion of the interview dialogue has been omitted (because it does not directly relate, positively or negatively, to the phenomena being illustrated).

(inaud.) 'inaudible' places where a word or short phrase was unable to be understood from the cassette tape.

(pseud.) notes pseudonym inserted for the actual name of a college, city, etc. in order to preserve anonymity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Failure and Rejection *Chronic Shame and Its Causes*

#### Introduction

Chapters Three - Five of this thesis seek to describe and analyze interviewees' experiences of chronic shame. Strauss and Corbin write that grounded theory research significantly involves determining the *relationships* between categories and subcategories of the phenomenon under study.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in these chapters, chronic shame is considered in terms of causes of shame, preventive strategies against shame, and consequences of those strategies (and of shame itself). In particular, we will seek to explore the peculiar roles of psychic and of social structures in this sequence of causes, strategies and consequences comprising chronic shame.

We begin in Chapter Three with a description and analysis first, of causes of chronic shame and next, of shame itself. As discussed in Chapter Two, Strauss and Corbin write that an important part of analyzing social phenomena is analyzing the conditions giving rise to those phenomena. The authors write that conditions may pertain to phenomena in terms of cause, context, or intervening conditions.<sup>2</sup> In the case of chronic shame phenomena, one of the leading conditions of those phenomena appeared to be shame's causes.

Two important causes of shame revealed by interviewees were failure and rejection. This chapter seeks to focus on

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<sup>1</sup>Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-106, 160.

interviewees' attitudes toward their failure and rejection, particularly their beliefs about distortion and uncertainty in those experiences. That is, interviewees appeared to experience shame for failing demands which they sensed they had exaggerated in their own minds in some way. Moreover, they experienced shame for rejection they were not certain had even occurred. Understanding dimensions of unreality in relation to shame may help pastors serve as 'reality checks' for counselees, in helping to alleviate shame. (We will return to this pastoral application in Chapter Six).

Concerning the peculiar roles of social and psychic factors in creating chronic shame, first, we explore the extent to which norms from interviewees' social settings (particularly the church) appeared to supply demands giving rise to failure and shame. Additionally, we explore the extent to which psychic structures may have increased these demands to demands of perfection, giving rise to frequent failures (and chronic shame). Moreover, as a potential resource for pastoral help, we reflect theologically on interviewees' failure and rejection in the context of a biblical scheme of a covenant of works.

This chapter is comprised of two sections. First, causes of shame are considered in terms of distorted failures and of uncertain rejection. Next, interviewees' attitudes toward shame itself are considered in terms of "wrongness" and of "pain." Again, according to principles of grounded theory (described in Chapter Two), it should be noted that a central analytical tool employed is comparison. By comparing various pictures of causes of chronic shame (and shame itself) supplied by interviewees, some of the analytic boundaries of this experience can be approached. Also, because the aim of Chapters Three to Five is to create a (single) narrative, any discussion pertaining to a related but tangential point, is discussed in a footnote.

In this chapter, you will meet Fran, Sylvia, Charlene, Matt, Keith, Jean and Barbara (in that order). Fran, Charlene, Matt, Keith and Barbara attended Fringes Presbyterian Church, while Sylvia and Jean attended Uptown Presbyterian Church.

## **I. Causes of Chronic Shame**

Interviewees named two primary causes of their shame. Those causes were failure and rejection. The separation of failure and rejection in sections one and two of this chapter is not meant to suggest that interviewees experienced one and not the other. The testimony of "Fran," for example, suggests the close link between the two.

Fran was a woman in her mid-thirties who appeared to suffer extensively from shame. Fran was a member of Fringes Presbyterian Church. When asked about the relationship between shame and failure in her life, Fran replied:

... For me, one of the biggest feelings of failure is relational. My twenty-first birthday, I had asked a couple of people, "Well, just come down to the Smith's Restaurant, off of Elm Street. Let's just sit down and have a drink. I don't feel like doing schoolwork. It's my birthday." No one came. (pause) About twelve people were supposed to come, and no one came. That was a massive failure.... I remember that feeling as being horrible. I mean just more overwhelming than anything.... It lasted, I remember that lasting for a long time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>While Fran does not specifically name her "horrible" feeling as shame, the focus on failure (very possibly including exposure before her own eyes), is an early indicator that shame may have been involved. More evidence for shame related to this incident can be found in section II of this chapter on "pain." As with all interviewees who suggested they suffered from shame on a chronic basis, multiple indicators of shame will not be apparent in each single episode, especially if theorists are correct that for chronic shame sufferers, shame becomes the deep, nameless organizing core of personality which as Kaufman writes, "recedes from consciousness" (see Thesis p. 26). Therefore, with Fran, as with all interviewees, a composite picture of their chronic shame, together with the varieties of

It is not immediately evident what Fran understood her "massive failure" in this example to be. After all, apparently she had done her part to invite her friends to the birthday gathering. It may be that Fran's interpretation of "no one [coming]" as a "massive failure" pointed to a confusion, or even a merging, of failure and rejection in her mind. In any event, Fran indicated that rejection was part of her lasting experience of this failure, as she explained:

And I began to think about friendship in a very deep way then. I began *thinking* about friendship. Like not just acquaintance. What does it mean to really be a friend. That was the first time that question had really dawned on me.

While interviewees did not always call explicit attention to both rejection and failure, they often seemed to resonate with both experiences simultaneously. Similarly, distortion and uncertainty may have been a part of interviewees' experiences at the same time. Nevertheless, while our running dialogue in this chapter will keep interviewees' experiences of failure and rejection in mind throughout, distorted failures and uncertain rejection seemed to capture prominent meanings in interviewees' minds and would appear to fairly serve them in describing their experiences.

#### **A. Distorted Failures**

As discussed in Chapter One, psychoanalyst Gerhart Piers distinguished shame from guilt primarily in terms of one's failure to reach a goal (presented by the Ego-Ideal). Piers writes:

Whereas guilt is generated whenever a boundary (set by the Super-Ego) is touched or transgressed, shame occurs

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experiences which appear to characterized the condition, unfolds across the entire narrative of Chapters Three - Five.



when a goal (presented by the Ego-Ideal) is not being reached. It thus indicates a real "shortcoming." Guilt anxiety accompanies transgression; shame, failure.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to Piers' focus on shame and failure, Heinz Kohut would later refer to the unrealistic demands placed on the reality-oriented ego in experiences of shame, suggesting some psychoanalytic foundations already in place for a discussion of distorted failures. However, descriptions offered by Piers and Kohut are provided in the language of psychoanalysis. It would appear that, given interviewees' frequent pointers to dimensions of distortion, descriptions of these experiences in church and theological context may prove pastorally useful. Describing and analyzing aspect of distortion from interviewees' experiences is an important aim of this chapter.

The term 'distortion' is meant to capture a variety of interviewees' meanings around the notion of error. The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines "distort" as follows: "Give an erroneous turn to, bias, (a person's thoughts, judgements, etc.); present a false account or interpretation of; alter so as to appear other than as it is; misrepresent."<sup>5</sup> It is this notion of a false account that is the focus of this term for this chapter.

You will recall that Fran experienced her friends' failure to attend her birthday party as a "massive failure." While interviewees continued to speak of 'failures' experienced in shame, more often than not, their attention turned to the expectations or demands giving rise to their failures. It is to these experiences of demands that we now turn.

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<sup>4</sup>Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1953), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*, 2 vols., ed. Lesley Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), I, 707.

## 1. Exaggerated Demands

"Sylvia" was a single woman, in her late thirties, who was a member of Uptown Presbyterian Church. Sylvia recounted an incident involving shame which occurred a number of years ago while she worked as a pastor of a church. The event concerned her failure to visit a parishioner on her deathbed. Sylvia recalled that when the parishioner died:

I thought, (*in a despairing voice*) "I'm weeeak; I'm scared; I'm selfish; and I had this vivid image of this woman just dying alooouooooooooone and generations of pastors had gone before me in that church and cared for the sick and dying, and then I came along and ignooooooooored them! (*Interviewer and Sylvia laugh at the drama in Sylvia's voice*) It was very all or nothing. (*Interviewer: It was sort of the weight of the whole -- I mean there were a lot of things that were drawn into the picture.*) Sure! The gallery of those who'd gone before me. It was very global and it was very all or nothing. Yeah like, aaaall those people; all that history of that congregation; and I am totally (*voice trails off to almost inaudible*) ... inadequate; I feel like a failure.

Recall from Chapter Two that two characteristic indicators of shame are first, signs of an experience of exposure, and second, exposure specifically related to one's self.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Sylvia's shame was suggested in her feelings of being "inadequate," in the eyes of the pastors who had gone before her. However, Sylvia called our attention to a

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<sup>6</sup>Concerning a definition of the "self" recall from Chapter Two that Helen Lewis writes that "the self refers to registration of experience as belonging to one's own identity." Lewis' definition of the self focuses on one's experience of 'who one is,' as opposed to 'what one does.' Lewis' mention of "experience" shows that actions (i.e., 'what one does') and events are related to the self, but only by how they serve to define one's identity. Another way to conceive of the self is as one's basic experience of being "I" or "me" as distinguished from other people and objects in the physical world. "Self" and "identity" have come to be used virtually interchangeably by psychoanalysts, and this thesis will share Lewis' definition of the self as a focus on one's identity.

Helen B. Lewis, "Shame and the Narcissistic Personality," *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 107.

peculiar aspect of her experience, i.e., the grand dimensions of her failure.

Those dimensions were particularly evident in Sylvia's description of the failed standard, namely "aaaall" those "generations of pastors" preceding her, a group which amassed an expectation of "global" proportions.<sup>7</sup> Sylvia's observation that "there were a lot of things that were drawn into the picture" (along with her voice emphasis on words of scale in the re-telling) suggested that she felt she had exaggerated the standard beyond what was really the case. Although Sylvia does not specify what she now believes the expectations from the dying woman, her congregation, or the other pastors at the time really were (or whether these expectations even mattered to her), she does seem to imply that these expectations, even if supplied by herself alone, were unrealistically enlarged.

"Charlene" had a similar story to tell. Charlene was a thirty-six year old woman, married to "Malcolm." Charlene was a member of Fringes Presbyterian Church. When I asked her how failure related to her feelings of shame, Charlene responded as follows (Background: The night of the interview, Charlene and Malcolm had invited me for dinner):

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<sup>7</sup>It should be mentioned that in Sylvia's example, like so many cases where significant shame affect is visible, and a transgression is involved, guilt was evident also. Note Sylvia's continued description:

(I had) reeeally let down a parishioner..... I just could not -- I was young, and I could not deal with going to see her, and I just didn't. And she died basically without a pastor. Well, you know, that was wrong. I failed her.

Helen Lewis writes that while denial is a sign of shame, rationalization is a sign of guilt (see pp. 83-84). Sylvia's rationalizations ("I was young and I could not deal with going to see her") were characteristic of an effort to discharge guilt (not shame). It should be noted also, that the drama in Sylvia's voice may have been prompted partly in the re-telling of this story to me, as she knew I was training to be a pastor (and hence, could be included among the gallery of pastors).

That's the one word that pops into my head when you say shame. I would be ashamed to have failed. (I: To have failed at what?) Anything! *Anything!* If you had walked in here tonight and dinner was not prepared -- I was thirty minutes behind -- that would be failure, and that would be enough to probably cause me to run and cry -- to run away, get away, never ask you here again, never see you again, because I would feel ashamed that I had let you down.

Although Charlene's example was hypothetical, she set it in the immediacy of that evening's events. As with Sylvia, Charlene's imagined failure was big -- big enough to cause her to "run away" and sever ties with me completely. Moreover, while Charlene's failed standard stood silently in the background, her focus on proportion ("would be enough...") suggested its exaggerated size.

It should also be said that Charlene appeared to point to another dimension of exaggeration, that of frequency. Charlene's punctuated "*Anything*" suggested that not only was shame frequently triggered in her life, but that it was triggered more often than she thought it ought to be.

Moreover, Charlene's prediction that she would "run away... never see [me] again" may have reflected a similar link between failure and rejection as that suggested by Fran. That is, Charlene's 'running away' may have been an attempt to escape me, before I could reject her. If this be the case, it is possible that Charlene, like Fran, may have known little distinction between failure and rejection. That is, failure may have meant rejection to her.

Returning to our discussion of exaggerated demands, where did these demands come from? Sylvia had a suggestion. Having once worked as a pastor of a church, Sylvia remembered this incident regarding her weekly sermons:

I felt that [shame] sometimes from the pulpit. I'd sit down and say, "Oh, my God! I have just preached the worst sermon! I wish the earth would open and swallow me up, and I would never... and of course, they thought I was a wonderful preacher and would never say, "Oh,

well that was stupid!" And the response was overwhelming, so in a way, it's kind of autonomous -- shame, in that situation; do you know what I mean?

By "autonomous" Sylvia may have meant that the precipitating demands were self-imposed. Fran would hint at this conclusion:

I'm living with a family, and it's just been a bad scene. They would probably not interpret it like that, but I have done a lot of work on myself inside, in order to even live there. Talk about shame; it's hard... to live there. Everything about my life in that house is based on shame. I'm ashamed of who I am. I'm ashamed of my gifts. I'm ashamed about the kind of person that God has made because it doesn't fit in.

Fran's shame in the eyes of a family who "probably would not interpret" the situation as she did may suggest that she did not see the family as her overt accusers. Charlene expressed it more directly. At one point in the interview, Charlene mentioned she felt demands to excel in business, golf, cooking and volunteer work, to name a few. However, when Charlene experienced only failure in many of these areas, she concluded:

(I: --So many demands.) But I placed them on me. (I: But still. But still) There were some that Malcolm placed on me, but we worked through all that. Most of it was I placed it on me.

To the extent interviewees concluded that demands giving rise to their shame were "self-imposed," causing shame to be "autonomous," their experiences may contradict, if only from the standpoint of the person experiencing the authorities, Agnes Heller's theory that 'internal authorities' alone are at no time responsible for shame (see Thesis p. 32). Even if Heller is correct, it may be significant that some people experiencing shame may not perceive authorities to be in any way external.

In Charlene's case, she later revealed more about demands, namely that only recently, had she been



...learning to accept the fact that not every day is going to be a banner day, and everybody has their ups and downs, and it's okay to have a bad day. [My pattern has been that] I would feel guilty<sup>8</sup> for not getting everything accomplished in a day, that I had set out to do... and I've come to realize that the goals that I set for myself are unrealistic.

It would appear that Charlene's use of "goal" here was as a self-appointed demand. Moreover, her conclusion that her goals were "unrealistic" indicated that the issue was reality. It may be that Charlene had at some point found some gauge on reality, if only in noticing, as she would later remark, "I set much higher goals for me than I would expect of Abigail or Malcolm."

However, while Charlene, Sylvia and Fran seemed to think they had experienced a distorted perception of failure in their shame, at least one other interviewee with the same contours of experience seemed to think the distortion was in other peoples' perception of his (supposed) failure, not in his own perception. Such was the case with "Matt." Matt (like all other interviewees introduced thus far) was a member of Fringes Presbyterian Church. Matt volunteered this story about shame:

I've got to tell you a little story. We were visiting in church one time, and it was in a church where people had the habit of coming in late. Well, as we walked in -- my wife and I tried to get there on time, and we, just before time to go to service she had to go to the bathroom something awful.... And so we were late, and when we came in they were singing a song, and I spoke to one of the men who I assumed was one of the leaders of the church.... and he said, "Well, we can seat you in a few minutes."... And then I said something like this, "Well, we tried our best to get here, but we just couldn't." And he smiled real sweetly and said, "Well, I've found that we need an attitude adjustment...." I thought "Buddy, you know, I know the Lord, and I know it wasn't our fault that we were late, and you say something like this to me." And I started thinking,

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<sup>8</sup>Charlene said later in the interview, as distinctions between shame and guilt became clearer to her, "everytime I say guilt, I mean shame." Charlene's comment may reflect the general lack of familiarity with the term "shame" for many Americans today (although this may be changing).



"Now I'm a visitor.... How could a guy do that?"... If I get an opportunity after service I'm going to just say to him, "If you promise me that you will never say that kind of remark about an attitude adjustment to another visitor to your church, I promise you that I will not say a word to your pastor that you said this to me." I was ready for him.

Matt offered this example in the context of our discussion of shame, and there is some reason to suspect shame was involved. However, to the extent shame was involved it is recognizable in this instance according to defenses against shame, more than shame affect itself. Recall from Chapter One that Wurmser has suggested that shame's aim is hiding, causing it virtually always to be found hidden behind defenses, to some degree. Moreover, Erving Goffman has suggested that shame is typically hidden because it is among the most socially unacceptable of emotions.<sup>9</sup>

Recall also that Gershen Kaufman has suggested five primary defenses against shame: rage, contempt, striving for power, striving for perfection, and blaming. At least two of these defenses are displayed by Matt. First, Matt's use of the address "Buddy," a term apparently invested with primitive hostility, suggests shame rage (or humiliated fury).<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Matt's blaming of his wife ("she had to go to the bathroom something awful...") and the church (where "people had the habit of coming in late") for his

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<sup>9</sup>Leon Wurmser, "Shame: The Veiled Companion of Narcissism," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 87.

Erving Goffman, Erving, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday & Co., 1967), pp. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup>Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, 2nd ed., (Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1985), pp. 74-75. In American culture when a person (usually a man) uses "Buddy" in an adversarial situation, it suggests 'fighting words.' Undoubtedly, in Matt's mind, the usher had gone from Christian brother to adversary. Mere righteous indignation, a trademark of guilt, would be unlikely to result in such a severe counter-attack as threatening to bring the wrong before the usher's pastor.

Helen Lewis also cites rage as a characteristic defense against shame. See Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), p. 91.

(and his wife's) lateness reveals a second of Kaufman's defenses.<sup>11</sup> It is possible also that Matt's inner retort "I know the Lord," was an example of a third of Kaufman's defenses, namely striving for power (as a Christian). In any event, as a defense of (Christian) identity, rather than the *action* of being late, Matt's words would suggest that his self had been implicated in the usher's comment, pointing to shame.

Assuming shame to be involved, the ferocity of Matt's reaction to the usher's comment about an attitude adjustment would appear to suggest that he, like Charlene and Sylvia, saw something very wrong -- or distorted -- in his shame experience. To a stray comment from a stranger, Matt defended his Christian identity to himself ("I know the Lord"); pondered the offense as unthinkable ("How could a guy do that?"); and considered threatening to charge the usher before his pastor ("If you promise me that you will never say...."). That is, in terms of the sheer proportions of Matt's reaction, in response to what some people might see as a trivial event, Matt's shame experience was not unlike Charlene's imaginary late dinner or Sylvia's sermon.

However, unlike Sylvia, Fran and Charlene, for Matt, the distortion did not appear to be in self-imposed demands, but in unfair judgments imposed by other people. After all, as Matt admitted, "If we *could* have gotten there earlier, then maybe it would have been what we needed (*chuckles*)."

(Even here, Matt's implication that it was not even humanly possible for him to have been on time suggests a disowning of responsibility not unlike the denial that H. Lewis calls a telltale defense against shame).

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<sup>11</sup>Blaming, says Kaufman, is a familiar pattern of externalizing the shame because shame has become so intolerable for the chronically ashamed person himself. Kaufman, p. 83.

It may not be coincidental that the only man in the sample thus far erected apparently more defenses against shame than did his female counterparts. Matt's apparent tendency toward defense may simply represent less ability to deal with emotions themselves. It has been suggested in gender studies that men historically have been less in touch with their feelings than have women. Arlie R. Hochschild asserts that historically, men have been encouraged to think, while women have been encouraged to feel. Hochschild begins her chapter on gender studies with this excerpt from the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*:

- Emotional    2.subject to or easily affected by emotion: **She** is an emotional woman, easily upset by any disturbance.
- Cogitation   1.meditation, contemplation: After hours of cogitation **he** came up with a new proposal.  
2.the faculty of thinking: **She** was not a serious student and seemed to lack the power of cogitation.<sup>12</sup>

Nowhere does Hochschild suggest that men have fewer feelings inside of them than do women. On the contrary, she finds "plausible" the suggestion of psychologist Nancy Chodorow that men simply have less access to their emotions than do women.<sup>13</sup>

Neither Hochschild's theory, nor Matt's example proves that men employ more defenses against shame than do women. However, because chronic shame, as a deep and diffuse emotion, would appear to be difficult for *anyone* to access, then to the extent Hochschild's theory is correct, shame would appear to be a particularly difficult emotion to be accessed by men.

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<sup>12</sup>Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, Ca: The University of California Press, 1983), p. 162.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

It could also be that men's tendency toward emotional defenses (if it is true) accounts for shame's long-standing label as a feminine emotion. In other words, shame may always have been just as common to men, but simply hidden more carefully behind defenses. Even with regard to this research, although five of seven chronic shame sufferers were women, other men among my interview sample may have been chronic shame sufferers; however, because shame was so carefully hidden by defenses, shame was undetectable to me in analysis of their dialogue. At this point, these thoughts are in the realm of speculation; however, they may suggest a realm for future research.

In the preceding discussion we explored instances when interviewees seemed to perceive that they had exaggerated in their own minds the demands giving rise to their failures (and shame). Next, we turn to a related dimension of distortion, again related to interviewees perceptions of expectations, namely perfection.

## **2. Chasing the Perfect Life**

At one point in the interview, Charlene said she was "chasing something." When asked what that was, she replied:

I don't know! Perfection, the perfect life, who I'm supposed to be, what I'm supposed to be doing. Why am I here? Why did God put Charlene on this earth? I'm still trying to figure that out. I don't know why He's got me here, because I do not feel that I have any significance, and I guess that's what I'm trying to find, is my significance.

While Charlene's search for significance remained on a somewhat theoretical level, her search for perfection revealed itself in more practical realms. In the context of describing her daily goal to have a "banner day," she revealed what typically got in the way:

I had too much on my agenda -- there was too much I was responsible for, and I wasn't able to do it all, and I

didn't like that, that I couldn't do it all, that I couldn't run a business, keep an immaculate house, be a good lover to my husband, cook wonderful meals, be the all and all at church, volunteering.

It appeared that Charlene was not content to work for a business; she believed she must run one. She was not content to keep a clean house; she believed it must be an immaculate one. Likewise, she aimed to be a good lover, cook wonderful meals and be the all and all church volunteer.

Charlene's quest for perfection may be evidence of what Heinz Kohut has suggested are ideal and grandiose self structures which, as a result of narcissistic injury, have not been fully integrated with the nuclear self. Kohut has theorized that in such cases these self structures continue to make demands of perfection upon the reality-oriented ego. When these demands go unmet, they end in emptiness (possibly signified in Charlene's search for "significance"), shame and depression.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Kohut attributes such narcissistic injury to inadequate emotional "mirroring"<sup>15</sup> from primary caretakers during formative development. Charlene had this to say about the reason for her quest for perfection (and her present-day experience with someone who was once one of her primary caretakers):

When I was at home taking care of hearth and home, she (i.e., Charlene's mother) made me feel guilty that I

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<sup>14</sup>Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*, The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Monograph 4, man. eds. Ruth S. Eissler, Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann, Marianne Kris and Seymour L. Lustman (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, Inc., 1971), pp. 108-109, 126-127.

<sup>15</sup>Kohut defines 'mirroring' as "the gleam in the mother's eye, which mirrors the child's exhibitionistic display, and other forms of maternal participation in and response to the child's narcissistic-exhibitionistic enjoyment [which] confirms the child's self-esteem...." Kohut, p. 116.

was not contributing to the income, because I didn't have children to keep me at home, so I was just being lazy. So then when I go out and I work, I'm neglecting home and I'm neglecting my husband, so it's just constant, and I think that that's really the core that has sent me into this circle.

There is some reason to believe that if Charlene's present-day experience of herself in her mother's eyes is inadequacy, then her mother very well could have been unable to fulfill her role as the "empathically approving and accepting parent" which Kohut argues is "one of the preconditions for the original establishment of a firm cathexis of the self...."<sup>16</sup>

However, even if a Kohutian analysis applies, Charlene's conservative Reformed environment would also appear to have had a role to play in forming those demands of perfection. Charlene's quest for perfection seemed to focus in areas related to changing roles for women. Elsewhere she provided further insight:

...biblically, my role is in the home, raising a family, taking care of my home, taking care of my husband, which I could be very content with, I think.

In yet another place in the interview, Charlene spoke of wanting to "go to Wall Street and bang out the big bucks" or at least to "own [her] own business and to make it successful" (which she did at the time of the interview). Therefore, adding 'biblical' demands, from Fringes Presbyterian Church to societal demands urging women to achieve in the marketplace, Charlene apparently found herself presented with a broad array of demands. When these demands were invested with perfection, evidently from fragmented self structures, it is little wonder that Charlene came to conclude that she had "too much on her agenda" and that her demands were "unrealistic."

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.



In order to sharpen the nature of Charlene's demands of perfection, it may help to contrast her experience to that of "Keith." Keith was a man in his late thirties, married with several children. Keith attended Fringes Presbyterian Church. In the midst of some reflections on his boyhood home of Korea, Keith shared these experiences about his brother:

My brother -- in elementary school he was the president, and the president was supposed to get into the top school, Kosaki, but he failed -- I mean he had to enter into the next best, the second best school.... My mother told me he was very ashamed of entering that school, instead of the top school, Kosaki.

Like Charlene, the demands Keith's brother felt appeared to be invested with perfection. Only the top school would do. However, Keith's brother's experience appeared to be a bit different from that of Charlene. Keith continued:

The school expected him to get into the Kosaki High, and my parents expected him to get in, but he could not -- the second best, he got in, and he was ashamed of that.... There are so many universities, but the top two or three, they are worshipped. The rest of them, shame.

In contrast to Charlene, not only the demands, but the perfection regarding those demands, appeared to be explicit in shared social norms. By contrast, in Charlene's case there would appear to be no reason to believe the perfection component was socially created. Therefore, there is some reason to suspect that in Charlene's case, it was in the investing of social expectations concerning gender roles with psychological demands of perfection that Charlene's repeated failures, and chronic shame, appeared to emerge.

Charlene's chase for perfection was paralleled by that of Matt. Earlier in this chapter we met Matt, through his illustration of being late for church. Elsewhere, Matt spoke in general terms about his Christian life:

And when I think about the areas of my life where I haven't really lived in accordance with God's will -- not fully obeyed him -- I still feel shame. Others may say, well you're doing this, this, and this, you know. But that's not the point. I still wonder if I'm really -- I continue to ask the Lord to help me... be totally obedient to *him*, and uh, so it's a, I suppose a constant struggle.

Matt's desires to "*fully obey*" God, being "*totally obedient to him*" bears a resemblance to Charlene's language of striving to "*keep an immaculate house, ... cook wonderful meals*" etc. (*italics mine*). In other words, perfection appeared to be the goal. However, unlike Charlene, who concluded that her goals were "*unrealistic*," Matt apparently turned a deaf ear on 'reality checks' from other people, who would have him know, "well, you're doing this, this and this," but instead, apparently chose rather to continue pursuing his goals of perfection.

According to Kohut's theory, then, Matt's demands of perfection would suggest unintegrated self structures continuing to make demands of perfection on his reality-oriented ego. Moreover, the fact that Matt's example is in a church context, and focuses on "obedience," may suggest that his Fringes Church setting may be a primary source of those demands. Further examples, may help. When I asked Matt where he thought his shame for being late to church came from, he provided this background information:

I can think to my background, the fact that when I was a kid, we used to have a sign up front, for Sunday school. On the one side of the sign, it said, "I'm early." On the other side of the sign it said, "I'm late."... Up to ten o'clock they had the sign toward the congregation, "I'm early." And at ten o'clock, it would be flipped around, and you walked in there and you were going to see that you were late! Isn't that some kind of zinger!

This background information to the incident of being late suggests one way church demands have taken root in Matt's life. While it may seem a trivial example, Matt's shame

would indicate that it was not trivial for him.<sup>17</sup> For Matt, it may have been part of Christian practice to "fully obey" God. Moreover, there were other threads to this story. For example, Matt gave this additional information:

But let me tell you a little postscript to the story [concerning being late to church]. We were sitting in a prayer meeting, a mid-week prayer meeting, my wife and I, sometime later, and this same gentleman came in about twenty minutes late. And I looked at my wife and she looked at me, and we smiled (*laughs*). (I: (*laughing*) You should have looked at your watch in an obvious way!) Maybe the fact that my wife and I smiled about it we need a good examination of our hearts.

Matt's mention of an "examination of [his] heart" may point to another example of piety included in Matt's attempts to "fully obey" God. In this case, the issue appeared to be purity of character, which might be breached if caught smiling at another person's misfortune.

More instances which appeared to fill out Matt's efforts to "fully obey" God will emerge in discussion of notions of "right" identity in Chapter Four. However, the above examples are provided as an early indication of the standards of Christian piety which appeared to be among the demands of perfection Matt sought to meet.

There is reason to believe that these demands arose, at least in part, from his Fringes Presbyterian Church context. Fringes Church is in the Presbyterian Church in America (P.C.A.) denomination. Note that the official

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<sup>17</sup>Matt himself may once have been tempted to shame people for being late to church. He reflected, concerning lateness to church:

My attitude has been changing. If I see someone come in late, instead of saying "Shame on them." I just lift them to the Lord, thankful that they got here, and whatever the problem was just help them to take care of that.

Quite possibly, the "I'm late" sign in church not only caused Matt to feel shame when he was late, but to be inclined to shame other people when they were late, an instance of a self-perpetuating character in shame.

covenant of entry into admission to the church reads this way:

Do you, in reliance on God for strength, solemnly promise and covenant that you will walk together as an organized church, on the principles of the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church in America, and that you will be zealous and faithful in maintaining the *purity and peace of the whole body?* (italics mine)<sup>18</sup>

The explicit mention of "purity" in this statement is repeated a number of times elsewhere in the church's polity manual. The point is that like Charlene, Matt's testimony appeared to reveal a collaborating of distorted (psychic) demands of perfection with real (social) demands from Fringes Presbyterian Church in creating his chronic shame. That is, while Fringes Presbyterian Church would appear to have supplied Charlene with expectations of womanhood, and Matt with expectations of piety, archaic demands of ideal selves heightened the demands to perfection regarding these demands. The result appeared to be a host of demands, all demanding perfection, providing many opportunities for Matt and Charlene to be riddled with failure and shame.

It would appear to be significant that both Charlene and Matt, as well as Fran and Keith, are all members of Fringes Presbyterian Church. In his book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, Dean Kelley writes that conservative churches are distinguished from liberal churches in large part by the *demands* that they place on their members. Kelley writes:

It is generally assumed that religious enterprises, if they want to succeed, will be reasonable, rational, courteous, responsible, restrained, and receptive to outside criticism.... They will not let dogmatism, judgmental moralism, or obsessions with cultic purity stand in the way of such cooperation and service. *These expectations are a recipe for the failure of the religious enterprise....* Amid current neglect and hostility toward organized religion in general, the

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<sup>18</sup>The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America (Decatur, Georgia: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, 1987), 5-9(3).

conservative churches, holding to seemingly outmoded theology and making strict demands on their members, have equalled or surpassed in growth the yearly percentage increases of the nation's population.<sup>19</sup>

Kelley goes on to write that the power a religious organization has over people is its ability to mobilize them around meaning in life. However, meaning retains its value as meaning (and avoids being a mere "notion") only as long as it requires something from people to attain it. Kelley continues:

So the quality that enables religious meanings to take hold is not their rationality, their logic, their surface credibility, but rather the *demand* they make upon their adherents and the degree to which that demand is met by *commitment*.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, according to Kelley, while all people will not respond to the demands, many people, attracted by the offer of meaning, will respond, and the commitment elicited by those people gives conservative churches their characteristic social strength.

This is not to say that Uptown Presbyterian Church is demand-free (although Kelley's work implies such churches place less demands on their members). Recall that two of Sylvia's shame experiences related to her previous job as pastor of a church (a P.C.U.S.A. church, presumably somewhat like Uptown Church). Again, the demands Sylvia felt first concerned the gallery of pastors who had gone before her, and second, the congregation who heard her sermon.

Were we to speculate, we might wonder the extent to which the expectations Sylvia apparently felt as a pastor might not have been peculiar to her liberal church setting. That

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<sup>19</sup>Dean M Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion With a New Preface for the Rose Edition* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1972 1st ed., 1977 2nd ed., 1986 Rose Ed.), pp. xxiv-xxv.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53.



is, in Sylvia's case, because women are not ordained in all Reformed denominations (including that of Fringes Presbyterian) and because women have been ordained in the denomination of Uptown Presbyterian Church only in recent decades, Sylvia may have felt added demands to perform in an exemplary way as a pastor in an effort to continue to secure a place for women clergy in the church. Even though liberal churches may not be characterized by demands they place on members, causes of social action to which they are devoted may be felt very much as demands (as well as opportunities).

Nevertheless, one implication of Kelley's analysis is that to the degree that churches like Fringes Presbyterian Church are characterized by demands, they provide explicit values (and people embodying those values) in which a narcissistic sufferer may find merger with perfection. This would seem to be one way to explain why five of seven interviewees given to repeated experiences of failure and rejection would voluntarily seek a church environment where opportunities for failure (and shame) were numerous.

A second plausible reason why people given to shame would choose a church environment characterized by demands is simple familiarity. Perhaps, once one is reared to understand acceptance in terms of demands and achievement, one is just as threatened in an environment in which there are no expectations as an environment in which expectations are numerous.

Third, chronic shame sufferers' selection of churches characterized by demands may simply be the nature of the times. Anthony Giddens writes that this present age of "high modernity" is a risk culture characterized by lack of cultural authority. Giddens suggests that people who experience particular anxiety over the absence of cultural authorities may seek to supply these authorities in an



authoritarian culture.<sup>21</sup> Conservative churches may qualify as such environments.

Thus far we have considered interviewees' perceptions of exaggeration and perfection in demands giving rise to their chronic shame. As mentioned in the Introduction to this section, failure and rejection appeared to be closely linked for interviewees as causes of shame. Next we turn to reflection on these experiences of failure (and rejection) according to a theology of a covenant of works.

### **3. Distorted Failures as 'Works' Acceptability**

Recall from our discussion in Chapter Two that pastoral counseling, as understood in this research, seeks to draw from one's religious tradition for resources to be used in counseling. One way for accomplishing this aim would appear to be theological reflection on peoples' experiences, in light of teaching from one's tradition. In this section we will consider a teaching from the Reformed tradition which may be useful with respect to a pastoral theological response to chronic shame. Also, this section aims to provide the reader with additional information concerning interviewees' own Reformed theological context, as we seek to locate their chronic shame experiences within that context.

Recall from Fran's example of no one attending her birthday gathering, that there was reason to suspect that failure and rejection were closely linked in her mind. Note also Charlene's comments:

Part of the acceptance -- part of your realizing that you're okay is getting somebody else in that inner

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<sup>21</sup>Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Oxford: Polity Press, in assoc. with Blackwell Publ., 1991), p. 196.

sanctuary you have within yourself and them saying you're okay too... it's almost like a second opinion.<sup>22</sup>

Charlene's need for a "second opinion" about her being "okay" appeared to suggest a susceptibility to feeling rejected. However, Charlene went on to admit that there were some risks in getting this second opinion. When I asked what those risks were, she explained:

Because you set yourself up for the hurt again. You set yourself up for the failure. You set yourself up for the rejection.

Charlene's reference to setting herself up for "the failure," coupled with her use of "hurt" and "rejection" suggested that there may have been a close link for her between the two concepts. Moreover, we previously noted the possibility of this link when Charlene suggested she would "run away" if she had failed to have dinner prepared on time.

Recall from earlier in this chapter that Gerhart Piers has written that shame results from failures (while guilt results from transgressions). Moreover, Piers goes on to write that the "unconscious, irrational threat implied in shame anxiety is abandonment..."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it would appear fair to say that for Piers, failure (resulting in shame) implies rejection. Moreover, the empirical data may provide some evidence confirming Pier's theory.

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<sup>22</sup>Charlene's references to "that inner sanctuary you have within yourself" one, which is protected from "letting somebody else within" pointed to 'covering' language of shame. Moreover, concerns for the adequacy of her self are reflected in her insecurity about whether or not she is "okay."

<sup>23</sup>Piers and Singer, p. 11.

Schneider also identified the primary underlying dynamic in shame as fear of rejection (separation), and he noted that the experience is deeply ambivalent. Drawing upon the work of Sylvan Tomkins, Schneider argued that the object from whom one feels separated, is one with whom the person maintains a positive cathexis and wants relationship.

Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), pp. 22-25.

Failure which implies rejection brings to mind what has sometimes been called a covenant of works. Covenant theology understands biblical and redemptive history in terms of God's covenants with his people. One such covenant was the Mosaic Covenant, or Old Covenant, established between God and the nation of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. Because in this relationship, obligation to observe the demands of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21) took a central place, these commandments came to be viewed as the conditions of the covenant, leading it to be termed by some as a covenant of works.<sup>24</sup>

Many theologians have argued, however, that the Mosaic Covenant was never truly a covenant of works, where failed works meant rejection by God. According to this argument, the Mosaic Covenant was superceded by the Abrahamic covenant, a covenant of grace, which was fulfilled in the covenant of Christ. Therefore, although there are various covenants in the Bible, they were each unilaterally established by a God of grace, differing only in the ways the covenants were administered. Some have sought to support this argument by contending that there is no Scriptural support for a covenant of works (although Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12 have been cited).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>G. E. Mendenhall has been one scholar to suggest that based upon the similarity between the Old Covenant and ancient suzerain treaty form, that Israel (but not God) was bound by the Mosaic Covenant, and blessings were truly conditional upon Israel's maintenance of the covenant stipulations. Similarly, those in the Arminian tradition have added that the Mosaic Covenant was God's economy for that particular dispensation of divine rule.

*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. ed. board, with dict. ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. "Covenant," by G. E. Mendenhall, I, 718-720.

<sup>25</sup>*New Dictionary of Theology* eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Leicester, England, 1988), s.v. "Covenant" by P.A. Lillback., pp. 173-174. *Encyclopedia of The Reformed Faith*, eds. D. McKim and D. F. Wright (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press), 1992, s. v. "Covenant" by M. Eugene Osterhaven, pp. 84-87.

Given the likeness of the Mosaic covenant to ancient suzerain treaty form, there is some reason to believe that the Israelite nation may have understood itself to be bound by a bi-lateral covenant. However, in light the biblical witness not only of Abraham, but of fulfillment in Jesus Christ, it would appear that God's covenants were never intended to be works-based, including as it pertains to the Mosaic Covenant. R. E. Clements writes that the Reformed tradition is among those to have maintained a strong regard for the unity of the Mosaic and Christ covenants, which has "lent... the Reformed tradition a strong regard for the gracious elements of the O.T. administration and a rejection of the notion that it presents a 'covenant of works.'" In support of his claim, Clements notes the reference in the Westminster Confession to "one covenant under different administrations" (Westminster Confession vii, 5).<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the "one covenant" to which the Westminster Confession refers was the Covenant of Grace. Arguably, to the extent that conservative churches are characterized by demands placed on their members, misinterpreted expression of those demands (i.e., living as if under a covenant of works) would seem to be in danger of contradicting the denomination's understanding of covenant found in its confessional statement. Ironically, covenant theology is probably more explicit in preaching and teaching at Fringes Presbyterian than at Uptown Presbyterian, in spite of the fact that interviewees at Fringes would appear to be the ones most given to living as if under a covenant of works.

In any event, the degree to which interviewees experienced failure to mean rejection would suggest that they were living under a covenant of works type scheme of acceptability. Notably, interviewees' examples of

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<sup>26</sup>A *New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), s.v. "Covenant," by R. E. Clements, pp. 127, 128.

rejection more often than not came in relation to other people, not God. For example on the one hand, Jean remarked, presumably about her relationship with people, ".... I'm always concerned, again, that I'm not acceptable. I'm not well-liked. I've done something wrong to hurt somebody." On the other hand, when it came to God, she had this to say:

...I know that God understands me, and is accepting of my trying not to be that way. Um, so that I don't *really* feel, I don't *really* feel -- people talk about feeling like a sinner -- it sounds egotistical..... It sounds unpious, pretentious, whatever, but it's not, because I don't -- I mean, I feel really badly if....

While it is possible that Jean lives in fear of rejection in her relationship with people, and in certainty of acceptance in her relationships with God, one wonders if Jean can truly maintain such a complete separation of the two. The degree to which interviewees' chronic shame experiences with other people affected their relationships with God and themselves is an issue of pastoral significance about which we will want to remain alert throughout this research.

Thus far, we have explored the nature of the demands giving rise to interviewees' failures and shame. In particular, we have observed dimensions of distortion in those demands, namely exaggeration and perfection. Moreover, we have explored the extent to which demands from interviewees' church (and societal) settings may have been combined with psychic demands for perfection to create interviewees' chronic shame. Additionally we have reflected on these experiences according to a theology of a covenant of works.

As has been mentioned several times before, while it did appear to be a fair representation of interviewees' experiences to separate failure and rejection in analysis, nevertheless, there did not seem to be a clear distinction between failure and rejection as causes of interviewees'

shame. Bearing this point in mind, we turn directly to interviewees' perceptions of rejection as a cause for shame.

## **B. Uncertain Rejection**

The aim of the previous section was to describe and analyze dimensions of distortion in interviewees' experiences of failure. Another important cause of shame for interviewees was rejection. As mentioned in the previous discussion, Piers writes, "The unconscious, irrational threat implied in shame anxiety is abandonment, and not mutilation (castration) as in guilt."<sup>27</sup> Interviewees did appear to experience rejection as a threat, as suggested by Piers, but also as a cause of shame.

As with the above discussion of failures, the particular dimension of rejection described and analyzed in this chapter relates to issues of what was real -- in this case, issues of uncertainty. In particular, interviewees appeared to experience rejection in others peoples' inattention and indifference. However, because the rejection in these messages was difficult to verify, interviewees could not always be certain that rejection had even occurred. Moreover, interviewees experienced rejection in other peoples' ambiguous messages, i.e., instances when there appeared to be no clear evidence of rejection. Describing and analyzing these experiences forms the focus of this second section of Chapter Three.

### **1. Inattention and Indifference**

"Jean" was a woman in her early fifties who worked as dean of students at a small college. Several months prior to our interview, Jean's college merged with another college,

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<sup>27</sup>Piers and Singer, p. 11.



with the president of the acquiring college becoming head of the combined institutions. At the time of the interview, Jean felt her relationship with the new president to be problematic, because as Jean put it, she "had felt some distancing from him in recent months." Jean elaborated on "distancing" this way:

But the feeling of the distancing is -- I'm always concerned, again, that I'm not acceptable. I'm not well-liked. I've done something wrong to hurt somebody. What did I do wrong?

Distancing, therefore, for Jean appeared to be about fear and feelings of unacceptability; moreover, Jean's repeated self-references ("I'm," "I've") -- self-references of inadequacy (not being "acceptable") -- provided a early possible link between distancing and shame. Her description of their phone conversation that day explained more:

[Regarding their conversation] I did not want him to reject me. I did not want him to think I was just the Dean of Students again down there, up there, wherever (*chuckles*), because I had felt some distancing from him in recent months.

Jean's continued concern for self, or identity issues ("just the Dean of Students"), in the eyes of another person continued to suggest that a predominate underlying emotion for Jean in her descriptions was shame. Moreover, Jean's explicit reference to her fear of "rejection" may be evidence of the threat of rejection inherent in chronic shame.

However, clear signs of rejection were difficult to find in Jean's account. What seemed important to her were various clues surrounding their phone call that day. Jean explained, for example: "but I mean like just today, I was talking to the President of Smallville College, who finally called me, to return a phone call." This was not the only time Jean picked up on the president's slowness in

responding to her. Concerning questions she had about new reporting relationships, Jean said,

So then I began to try to call him, and never could make the connection with him over the phone. I just left a message.... Finally, I wrote him a note, and finally I sort of got him in a meeting on the side, and I said, "I've been trying to reach you to clarify what my relationship is with Jim, and who do I report to, to you or to him?" And he talked in circles, and sort of said "It's not important who you report to."

In giving these examples to describe distancing, Jean provided a picture of suspected rejection which seemed to point to the president's *inattention* to her, rather than his overt rejecting behavior. Because these signs were based on what was absent, rather than present in his behavior, Jean could never be sure of rejection, even when her fears gave way to more acute feelings of shame. These acute feelings appeared to emerge in the following example. During a social gathering with work friends, Jean recounted:

Yes, that's the distancing, and there were a couple of social occasions in the Spring when he [the president] would say, you know, "Hi, Jean," and then kind of walk on, without stopping to converse with me. And he was talking to other people, socially chatting, and he wouldn't do that with me. Not that he *wouldn't*, but he *didn't*. So, I just thought, "Oh, Jean, don't get paranoid." I kept thinking, "I am getting paranoid about this... so again, I thought (*in rapid fire sentences*), "I must have done something wrong. What'd I do? What's wrong with me? I'm not good enough! I'm not," you know, all that kind of stuff.

Again, for Jean it appeared to be the president's inattentiveness (i.e., not "stopping to converse" with Jean when he "was talking to other people"), which she saw as rejecting ("he wouldn't [talk] to me"). And in this case, because shame affect emerged more clearly in Jean's words of self-reference ("What's wrong with me?"), this appeared to be an instance when rejection was not simply a threat in shame, but a cause of shame.

However, while Jean's shame may have been real, she apparently continued to be uncertain about the president's rejection of her as a precipitating cause of shame, either at the social gathering or in more recent interaction. Returning to Jean's telephone conversation with the president that day, Jean's reflections on the conversation amounted to the following:

*I felt okay about the conversation, I think, from his point of view.... I took that as a very positive thing.... He didn't seem at all restrained. He didn't seem distanced.... He seemed very accommodating.... I felt good about that.... I wasn't sure.... I wasn't really sure (italics are mine).*

Given this host of words of uncertainty, it was not surprising Jean concluded that in the end, she could not tell whether or not "this distancing... was real or imaginary."

It is possible that Jean's experiences are an example of what Kohut has called selfobject transferences. For Kohut, selfobject transferences are the self's attempt to repair its fragmentation by merging with 'objects' (usually people) in one's social setting. By merging, Kohut means that these people are taken into a person's self, effectively becoming a part of one's self, for the purpose of serving one's needs for perfection and grandiosity which went unmet in early childhood.

Kohut describes two types of selfobject transferences, the idealizing transference and the mirror transference. The mirror transference is one where a person invests *him/herself* with perfection and omnipotence, and often appears to be manifested in grandiose feelings of being 'special.'<sup>28</sup> Interpreted through Kohutian eyes, there may be reason to think that Jean expected a measure of 'specialness' to be mirrored back by the president, by

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<sup>28</sup>Kohut, p. 106.

means of his making a particular point to stop and chat with her. Moreover, Jean's careful attention to the president's cues during their phone conversation that day may have indicated a similar need for confirmation of specialness.

Kohut goes on to write, however, that the selfobject inevitably rejects the person because his/her grandiosity is unrealistic, resulting in painful shame.<sup>29</sup> Again, according to Kohut's theory, the shame Jean felt at the social gathering because the president did not stop and talk to her would be attributed to Jean's unrealistic expectation of the president. After all, Jean did say that the social gathering consisted of a large number of people all from the college over which the president was now the new head. One would expect that he would have wished to speak to any number of people at the gathering. Nevertheless, Jean wanted him to stop and chat with her, and seemed to feel rejection (and shame) when he did not.

Again, Jean's uncertainty in her accounts raises a question about the relationship between feelings of shame and fear of shame. While shame affect was indicated from time to time in Jean's descriptions (such as in her words "What's wrong with me?" at the social gathering), Jean's inability to confirm rejection leaves one with the impression that Jean may be living with ongoing fear of shame, alongside shame itself. Hence, rejection would appear to serve as a threat in shame as suggested by Piers, but also as a cause of shame.

Fran also described feeling shame based on something less than hard evidence of rejection. Recall that we met Fran earlier in this chapter in the context of her comments

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<sup>29</sup>Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach*, ed. Charles B. Strozier (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985), p. 107.

about the family with whom she was living. Fran had explained:

...Everything about my life in that house is based on shame. I'm ashamed of who I am. I'm ashamed of my gifts. I'm ashamed about the kind of person that God has made because it doesn't fit in.

When asked what she felt ashamed about in that house, Fran revealed:

Anything that smelled of artisticness. Anything that smelled of a creative process. (I: What did they value?). Their schedule. (pause) Their time. (pause) I mean, they'd read my papers. I'd come home with A's on these papers, and they'd say, "Oh, great." Or they'd hear something about a class I talked about -- and I'd say, "I had an interesting discussion in class about this," or something like that, and I mean not even thirty seconds into that discussion they'd change the subject. (I: Weren't interested.) Nothing, nothing that I was thinking about, nobody was proud of me, (whispering) nothing, nothing!

Fran nowhere mentioned any disparaging remarks made by the family about her creativity, or anything else for that matter. Like Jean, Fran's shame appeared to result from the family's inattention to her, more than anything else. Moreover, it may be that Fran's reference to wanting the family to be "proud" of her reflected the archaic desire to be special, again, characteristic of a Kohutian mirror transference which Fran had effected with the family. Even if one did not accept an explanation of a selfobject transference, Fran's reference to wanting the family to be "proud" of her would seem to reflect a sentiment appropriate for a child to wish in the eyes of parents, not for a woman in her mid-thirties to wish in the eyes of friends.

For at least one interviewee, the issue did not appear to be inattention so much as indifference. Sylvia recalled the following experience of shame:

I thought of another example. It reminds me of -- one time I had a car accident. I was like sixteen, or



seventeen, and I rammed into the back of a car, you know, fender-bender. I *juuuust* felt *humiliated* by the whole thing. I was upstairs in my room just sobbing about it, and my father came up to talk to me about it for the first time, and he was sort of like, "(very *hum-drum* voice) Well, it's too bad it happened, (*pause*) and we'll get it fixed, (*pause*) and we hope you'll be more careful next time."

At face value, Sylvia's father's words would appear to have been understanding. However, Sylvia's re-telling of the story using a *hum-drum* voice was an early sign that Sylvia did not receive it this way. Sylvia continued:

It was *not comforting at all!!* It was "(*hum-drum* voice) Yeah, we're pretty disappointed." But it wasn't anger. It was something like anger that I could respond to "Well, get off my back!! Bluh, bluh bluh!!" It was like, "Uuuuuuuuuugh." (I: Was it demeaning? Was he trying to put you down?) Yeah, in a very indirect way. I think someone looking at it from the outside would say he was being uncritical and forgiving and going with the flow and everything, but I think I experienced it as "(voice *soft but firm as if cutting to the bone*) Oh, you messed up! You really did. And now we're going to clean up after you." I mean it was kind of like, "You really messed up, but we'll take care of it."

It is difficult to know precisely what caused Sylvia to interpret her father's "uncritical and forgiving" response to be shaming. The words Sylvia recounted her father to have said ("...it's too bad it happened...") and the meaning she heard ("You really messed up, but we'll take care of it") appeared to be at variance. It may be the incongruence between Sylvia's own response and her father's response caused her to think there was some hidden message (of shame) in her father's words. Or it may be simply that for someone who is disposed to shame, any message of parents being "disappointed," no matter how uncritically it was offered will result in added shame. However, in citing her father's lack of anger as the reason for her shame, it appeared that Sylvia may have reacted most to the absence of a strong emotional response to an event about which she felt very strongly. In other words, it appeared to be her



father's relative indifference, as Sylvia interpreted it, that for Sylvia brought shame.

The anger which Sylvia said was preferable to indifference in the above example may be contrasted to anger which apparently functions differently in an example described by Charlene. In the context of explaining the shame she would feel if she was caught in a lie to another person, Charlene provided this example:

For instance, Abigail is my dearest friend, and if I was to lie to her, I would regret it, but I would --  
(*turning to Abigail*) I've never lied to you so I can't  
(*Abigail laughs in background*). Yeah, but if I had, I couldn't come to you and admit it, because I feel like I'm not worthy of the possibility of you forgiving me.  
(I: Would you fear that Abigail would reject you?)  
Yes. That she would be so angry that I lied to her that she'd be angry -- the whole reason I would have lied was because the truth would have made her angry and I didn't want her to be angry at me.

Charlene's three references to her fear that Abigail would be "angry" with her suggested that anger may have been closely connected to rejection in her mind. Notably, Sylvia said she would have preferred anger than indifference from her father. Although we cannot draw a firm conclusion from the data provided, the difference between their accounts may have related to the unique relationships involved. It could be, for example, that for Sylvia, anger from her father did not mean rejection to her, while for Charlene, anger from Abigail had come to mean rejection to her. Otherwise, this case provides reason to be cautious in generalizing the findings concerning what people find shaming.

The above example may also be another instance of a failure (i.e., lying) meant rejection for Charlene by Abigail. In this way, again, a scheme of works acceptability would appear to be in effect. Finally, Charlene had this to say about rejection:

...What's even worse -- where they meet you half-way,... where they say, "You're okay, but you're not as good as you think." (Malcolm: That sounds like what your mother would say.)... It's almost like that lukewarm is... even more startling because you don't even know how to react to that. It's not rejection. It's not acceptance. It's in between, and then it's like, "Now what! Where do I stand?"

For Charlene, the problem with "lukewarm" responses appeared to be that they left her uncertain regarding rejection. In fact, she sounded as if she might prefer outright rejection to the alternative of being uncertain. Charlene's volunteering of this example about uncertainty may have pointed to just how difficult this dynamic had grown in her life, in relation to chronic shame.

## **2. Ambiguous Messages of Never Measuring Up**

In the preceding section, we discussed interviewees' experiences with inattention and indifference as uncertain signs of rejection, but nevertheless as causes of chronic shame. In this discussion we turn to a different type of issue concerning reality, that of ambiguous messages as causes of shame. You will remember from the discussion earlier in the chapter that Charlene sought "perfection, the perfect life." When I asked Charlene why she felt she must chase the "perfect life," she explained,

My mother is a perfectionist... my mother always pushed me to be more than I was. She kept telling me that I was so talented, and I was so smart, and I was lazy, and I didn't use the gifts God gave me. All my life. Now it didn't matter that I skipped a grade of elementary school, that I skipped a grade of high school. It didn't matter that I graduated early from college. I still never have measured up in her eyes.

Charlene's belief that she "still never have [has] measured up in her [mother's] eyes" may have been a hint of both her longing for, and her hopelessness (as a woman in her mid-thirties) of achieving, her mother's approval. However, the way Charlene remembered her mother's words may also be significant. Charlene's characterization of being

"talented" and "smart" but also "lazy" and irresponsible with her gifts suggests an ambiguous, conflicting message very similar to that shared by Jean.

We previously met Jean in the context of her relationship with the president of the college where she was employed as dean of students. This time, we turn to Jean's childhood memories, to an incident occurring some thirty years ago:

I remember one time we were... sitting in the living room in my aunt's house. [There were] fifteen or twenty people.... My father said something about me, in front of all these people. It was either critical, or ridiculing me, or something or other. I just sat there quietly, and the tears just were coming down my face.... It may have been that he was putting me down about going to college. I know he used to often say to me, for being so smart, you sure are stupid, when I'd so something dumb....

Jean's conflicting message about being at once "smart" and "stupid" appeared similar to Charlene's message from her mother of being "smart" and "lazy." While Charlene's message was not conflicting in actual fact, in that a person can readily be smart and lazy simultaneously (but not so easily smart and stupid), her message was similar to Jean's in that in both cases, parents appeared to be telling their children that they were good and bad at the same time.

On the surface, there would appear to be uncertainty in such a conflicting message of failure and rejection. However, both interviewees appeared to interpret their parents' comment to say that they were not measuring up, hinting, by implication, that the result was rejection). Jean continued:

And that was an awful thing for me to do, for being so smart, because I was going to college. I mean, I was an 'A' student. I was the first in the family to do all these kinds of things, but, it was this common sense stupid....

Jean's conclusion that she was indeed "stupid" causes it not to be surprising that some thirty-five years after this incident, Jean lamented, "[Even today] there's that gnawing thing that you're still not good enough. As a kid I was never good enough. My marriage wasn't good enough.... I don't ever think it goes away completely."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>It may be that those who have lived with ambiguous messages may use the same tactics on people around them. For example, at one moment during the interview, Charlene interjected the following:

Do you feel like you're intruding, or you're asking too much? See, I would in your shoes. (*Interviewer laughs nervously*). No, I don't think you are, but if I were you that's what I would be feeling like, "Gee, I'm really imposing." (*Interviewer again laughs nervously*) I don't feel that way towards you doing it, but I would feel that way about me doing it.

I: No, no, yeah, right, right. I don't feel that way right now so much as um -- I guess I do feel that imposing, more in terms of time, I think, than --

Charlene's comment that, "I don't feel that way towards you doing it, but I would feel that way about me doing it" was received by me as an ambiguous shaming message similar to the ones she and Jean described receiving from parents. On the one hand, I was not supposed to feel I was intruding. On the other hand, Charlene's vicarious feelings of intrusion appeared to come as an indirect message that I should be feeling like an intruder also. I felt shame when she said it, and I was immobilized as to how to respond, because she did not give me a clear target to resist. The conversation continued:

Charlene: -- It's Friday, baby, we've got three days, or two anyway.

Malcolm: (*making a joke*) He's only got one tape.

I: Um, but anyway, um.

C: I threw you off.

As if sensing that her ambiguous put-down had hit and disarmed its victim (me), Charlene appeared to back off and try to cover her deed by suggesting another distorted message, i.e., that she had all weekend to continue the interview. Finally, Charlene closed with the only straightforward comment of the entire interchange, concluding that she "threw [me] off" (which of course, she did!).

Nathanson writes that one of the four basic reactions to shame on his "compass of shame" is to "attack other." What Charlene may have been doing was to attack me before I could attack her. Or, perhaps she already felt attacked by me during the interview, and sought retaliation as a defense against her own shame.

It is not clear to what extent Charlene and Jean were consciously aware of the ambiguity (i.e., uncertainty) in these messages from their parents. They appeared to accept the ambiguity readily and uncritically, possibly because they were so familiar with ambiguity. Nevertheless, the sense of not measuring up and the implied rejection appeared to be real.

While for Charlene and Jean, rejection in the form of ambiguous messages came from parents, Matt's rejection experienced through ambiguous messages related to the church:

I can speak for myself, yes, I've experienced [shame] (*gentle, nervous chuckle*).... I mean I've been a Christian almost all my life; I found the Lord when I was five years old. I've always had a fondness for the song "Just As I Am" -- I don't know if that was the song we were singing, but I've always loved it! But I would go, as a young guy -- during the week I would fight with my brothers or something, and Mom and Dad would get on my case [i.e., scold or punish him], but then I would go on Sundays, you know I just felt that sense of, I'm not what I ought to be yet, you know, so I thought I'd go and seek to be saved again or whatever (*gentle, nervous chuckle*).

Matt's mention of his fondness for the song "Just As I Am" prior to his description of his repeated need to feel "saved again" would appear to provide a conflict of meanings juxtaposed to each other, of a type similar to those described by Charlene and Jean. One wonders about the extent to which Matt's church environment presented him conflicting messages of the faith, i.e., that he was at once saved 'just as he was' while he also had to avoid certain behaviors (like fighting with his brothers) to avoid losing his salvation. It may also be that his parents' 'getting on his case' about it intensified the message that fighting meant he had lost his salvation.

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Donald Nathanson, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992), pp. 312-313.



It is not clear how the song and his urge to be saved repeatedly were related in Matt's mind, then or now. However, they do point to possible ways church, as well as familial, environments can convey ambiguous messages, which in turn can be interpreted as rejecting by parishioners. Additionally, the above example may be an instance of a works scheme of acceptability -- this time in the eyes of God -- like that discussed earlier in this chapter.

One can only speculate why these ambiguous messages appeared to cause interviewees to experience not measuring up in parents or in God's eyes. It is possible that confusion inherent in the conflicting, ambiguous messages obscured the put-down, allowing it more ready access into their conscious minds. Had the messages been ones of outright deprecation, they may have been more easily recognized and resisted by interviewees.

In the above examples, interviewees appeared to interpret ambiguous messages to be rejecting messages. By comparison all messages interpreted by interviewees as rejecting were not ambiguous. Jean related the following account:

I remember as a child... my father worked as a delivery man for the Coca Cola company... and I remember -- we were living with my grandparents at the time; we were saving money to buy a house -- and he brought home some toys. I remember one of them being some sort of blow-up balloon...just penny toys, that he had gotten at some store.... We were playing with them, and we brought them home, and I broke whatever, I think it was this balloon thing, but whatever it was, I broke it. And he said, "That's the last time we'll bring anything home for you!" And it was *(softly)*. He never brought anything home again. *(pause, then voice pick up volume again)*. And so there's always that feeling that you're going to be put off, or rejected....

Jean felt rejected here just as she appeared to feel when her father said that "for being so smart, [she] sure was stupid." However, in saying "That's the last time we'll bring anything home for you!" Jean's father appeared to



employ a clear, as opposed to an ambiguous, message of rejection. This example is provided simply to say that quite possibly a variety of messages, both ambiguous and clear, were interpreted by interviewees as rejecting.

It is not clear, however, why this one incident was taking a "whole lifetime" for Jean to be "lifted out" of. Quite possibly, this event was representative of others like it where Jean felt rejected by her father (such as the "smart and "stupid" example referenced above). Nevertheless, Jean's example suggests that one should not underestimate the power of a single event in a child's life.

It may not be coincidental that interviewees appeared to have devoted considerable energies to avoiding confirmation of these parental and church messages interpreted as rejection. Jean, who heard she was "stupid," has gone on to get a Ph.D. Charlene, who heard she was "lazy," has not only earned two university degrees, but started a successful business as well. Matt, who may have heard that improper actions related to the church can cause one to lose his/her salvation, has gone on to achieve as elder and otherwise energetic worker in his church.

In support of his argument that parents regularly employ shaming messages with their children, Michael Lewis cited in his empirical studies parents' love withdrawal and facial expressions of contempt and disgust toward their young children.<sup>31</sup> The ambiguous messages of rejection recounted by interviewees may be another of the ways that not only parents, but churches (and presumably other institutions also) can bear shaming messages to those under their authority.

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<sup>31</sup>Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), p. 10.

The preceding section sought to describe and analyze causes of chronic shame. We now turn to expressions of that shame itself.

## II. Expressions of Chronic Shame

As mentioned in Chapter One, Leon Wurmser has suggested that shame phenomena are virtually synonymous with defense. Helen Lewis has added that shame tends to be a wordless state, given to visual imagery (while guilt is characteristically verbal).<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly, interviewees provided more descriptions about causes of chronic shame, than they did about shame affect itself. However, two clusters of meanings which each emerged in several interviewees' stories were shame as "wrongness" and as "pain." It should be noted that while the discussion on "wrongness" begins with a consideration of interviewees' conceptions of "sin," the two terms are not taken to be equated in interviewees' minds.

### A. Shame as "Wrongness"

Nearly all interviewees were asked a question along the lines of what their experience of "sin" was. This was Fran's answer:

Well, to me, I see [sin] sort of a -- what do they call it in the Bible? Slothfulness. That's how Paul uses it in his list of things. Sluggishness and slothfulness, not being active.

Avoiding "slothfulness" was integral to faith expressions of the Puritans, early forerunners to modern conservative Reformed faith. However, Fran's unfamiliarity with the word ("what do they call it? ...slothfulness"), coupled with the relative lack of emphasis on "slothfulness" in

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<sup>32</sup>Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, pp. 137-139.

contemporary Christianity (including modern expressions of the Reformed tradition), may indicate that the Bible was not the only, or even the primary, 'text' informing her notion of "sin." Fran went on to give an example of "slothfulness:"

And if it's relaxing for me to go out and get stencils to stencil my bathroom, I mean is that wrong? There are guidelines for right and wrong, and yet I come back to the things I know I *must* do. That cycle for me is just horrible. So two days last week I worked on this one paper and made major headway in it, but it didn't change the ultimate feeling that they have to get done, and it's not done.... Those are some major ones, right there. Those are some real current, that's current.

In our earlier analysis under the heading "Chasing Perfection," we discussed Heinz Kohut's theory that for the narcissistic sufferer, unintegrated self structures continue to make demands of perfection upon the reality-oriented ego, which when unmet, result in shame. However, Kohut writes of another type of repeated demand suffered by a narcissistic person, namely demands for external success. Agnes Heller has observed this same phenomenon on a societal level, concluding that societal norms in America have been one-dimensionalized according to success (and failure).<sup>33</sup> Given Fran's focus on what she "*must* do," it is possible that psychic and societal demands for success (reflected in her drive to do only that which she "*must* do") may be behind her sin of "slothfulness" as much as is the apostle Paul's list.

To the same question concerning her experience of sin, Charlene gave this answer:

I feel -- I regret it, and I feel like it would be the most horrible thing if anybody found out that I had done that... that I had told a lie, or that I had cheated on the books, or whatever, um, hid something from Malcolm....

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<sup>33</sup>Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities*, pp. 108-109. Agnes Heller, *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 17-18.

Charlene's fear of being "found out" indicated that shame may be prominent in her experience of sin.<sup>34</sup> However, even though Charlene's appeal to stealing and lying can be seen as biblical norms (two of the Ten Commandments), the near universality of these norms leaves no particular reason to believe that norms of "sin" from her church tradition figured prominently into her experience of shame.

Perhaps this should not be surprising. Karl Menninger has argued that sin disappeared from American society and the Church around the beginning of the twentieth century. Menninger concludes a new social morality emerged at that time, characterized by people not wanting to 'control' human behavior. Societal 'sin' was relegated to legal crimes, such as murder or rape, and sin was seen to result from *illness*, which was largely out of a person's control and therefore less worthy of condemnation.<sup>35</sup>

Central to Menninger's argument is that in addition to notions of sin, language of "sin" disappeared around the beginning of the twentieth century. With respect to interviewees, I was the one who introduced "sin" language. Therefore, even though several interviewees discussed sin in relation to shame, there was little reason to expect "sin" was a significant meaning for them to describe their shame. What, then, was their language for shame? Recall

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<sup>34</sup>Charlene had more to say about sin and shame. Concerning her sin, Charlene admitted:

But I feel trapped by [sin] too, like you've done it; you've made your bed. I don't have the guts to own up to it. (I: Own up to it....) Admit it to whoever it was that I sinned against. (I: Because if you did own up, what would that be like?) It would be putting my relationship with that person in jeopardy.

Charlene's inability to "admit" her sin to another person indicates the barrier to confession erected by shame. While confessing a shame issue threatens more shame, confessing a guilt issue, by contrast, tends to bring freedom and relief.

<sup>35</sup>Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (London: Bantam Books, 1973), pp. 41-52.

Fran's words, in the excerpt above, in describing her compulsion to do only that which she *must* do:

Well, does that mean that any form of relaxation is *wrong*? Any form of that kind of thing? That's what I mean. And if it's relaxing for me to go out and get stencils to stencil my bathroom, I mean is that *wrong*? There are guidelines for right and wrong, and yet I come back to the things I know I *must* do. (*italics for "wrong" mine*)

Fran's reference to "guidelines for right and wrong" suggested that language of "wrong(ness)" may have had more ethical meaning for her than did language of "sin." Jean, whose response to my question concerning sin was that she did "not really feel like a sinner" appeared to prefer the same language of being "wrong." You may remember from our earlier discussion that Jean once was scolded by her father for breaking a toy. Jean expressed her shame this way:

(I: How did you feel when he said that, as a little girl?) Well, that I had done something wrong, and when all of the time -- the rest of the time, when I did anything wrong again -- I'm not going to get whatever - - I'm not going to be approved, or I'm not going to be, you know, whatever.<sup>36</sup>

Culpability appeared to play a significant part in Jean's shame. She felt she had "done something wrong" when she broke the toy. Elsewhere in the interview, Jean suggested that wrongness as a sense of parental disapproval had shadowed her for much of her life. She explained:

I could never do anything appropriate or good or right or whatever, for my parents either as I was growing up, constantly. And now -- my father is dead -- my mother is sort of like whatever I do is still not right, as an adult.

Given that Jean indicated no hint of change in her experience of parental disapproval, it may not be surprising that she concluded, "The whole idea of doing

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<sup>36</sup>While Jean spoke of *doing* something wrong -- and indeed, her chronic shame often related to actions -- the sweep of her testimony suggested the message of wrongness to have settled solidly into her being, pointing to shame.

something wrong. Being lifted out of that has just taken a whole lifetime."

While Jean's shame of "wrong(ness)" may have been born in experiences where culpability was involved (such as breaking the toy), evidence of culpability became more difficult to spot in later events. Recall in Jean's example from the social gathering, the issue was that Jean's boss had not paused longer than simply to say "hello" to her. As a passive responder to her boss' approach, Jean would appear to have committed no wrong; however, Jean's self nevertheless appeared to feel implicated: "I must have done something wrong.... What's wrong with me?"

Barbara shared this example of her bout with chronic shame:

I've gone through major, major struggles I think for about two years because of basically two women, you know. And one woman would always just make kind of a nasty remark to me. I never know how to respond back! And then I'll say "hi" to her, but then she just kind of passes me by, you know, and then I just feel like, what did I do wrong? What's so bad about me that this person would not say "hi" back to me? So, I mean, those little things really make me really go through the whole day just thinking, "Oh God!" And then you fall into depression (*chuckles*).

It appeared to be Barbara's self which was implicated in the experience ("What's so bad about me?"), suggesting that her response was shame. Moreover, like Jean, Barbara seemed to think herself culpable based not on something she had done, but on something another person had done (or failed to do).

Helen Lewis concluded from her empirical studies that for the shame-disposed person, self boundaries are softer and less clear, causing localization of experience to be more



fluid in shame than guilt.<sup>37</sup> It would appear that in basing her own culpability on someone else's actions (over which she presumably had little influence), Barbara demonstrated what appeared to be a failure to recognize a clear delineation between actions for which she was responsible and those for which another person was responsible.

It may be that this finding suggests another dimension of unreality, in this case with respect to interviewees' attitudes toward their shame itself. That is, in these examples provided by Jean and Barbara, interviewees' appeared to feel "wrong" in instances where there would appear to be no objective sign of a wrong committed.

Interviewees' understanding of their shame in terms of being "wrong" was not the only meaning they attached to the experience. Another meaning was language of pain.

#### **B. Shame as "Pain"**

Carl Schneider has argued that shame experiences have three primary characteristics. That is, they are "unexpected," "disorienting," and "painful." Of these three, interviewees from this research sample spoke mainly of "pain."<sup>38</sup>

Fran told of a shame experience with her friend "Jason." When Fran was exposed by Jason as wrong on a certain topic, Fran remembered reacting this way:

I could have crumbled. It was like sawdust, in fact. It was like nothing -- and the pain. The pain was more intense. It was amazing. It was a crumbling, I guess.... So the shame was intense.

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<sup>37</sup>Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, pp. 12-13, 31-33, 39, 44, 126-136, 500.

<sup>38</sup>Schneider, pp. 22-25.

Fran's "crumbling" may have been an example of the "disintegration anxiety" Kohut has suggested can accompany severe shame.<sup>39</sup>

Fran's images here appear to convey the "intense" nature of her pain. Recall Fran's account of having no one show up at her birthday gathering (pp. 89-91). This is how Fran described the shame:

I remember that feeling as being horrible. I mean just more overwhelming than anything. It just, that one, that one was so painful. It lasted. I remember that lasting for a long time.

Not only could Fran's pain be intense, but lasting. By "lasting" Fran may have meant that she not only re-experienced pain with each memory of the event, but she may have meant that a low-lying level of pain simply persisted. This would seem to be a possibility for someone who had internalized shame as a core of personality.

While Fran spoke of "pain," Matt turned to other language to describe his experiences. Recall we first met Matt when he turned up late for church. Matt went on to describe his ongoing relationships with Christians:

Of course I care about what my brothers and sisters in Christ say about me, uh -- I'm not terribly, I don't have a big plate of armor around me.... Well, I think the barb is when someone basically questions my commitment.

It may be that Matt's choice of "barb" (and later the even tamer "zinger" and "zonker") felt more acceptable to him when speaking to a Christian friend, before whom he may wish to have appeared uncomplaining. Additionally, to the extent that emotional "pain" is feeling language, then based on the discussion earlier in this chapter regarding Matt's tendency to employ defenses against shame, Matt

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<sup>39</sup>Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1977), pp. 136-137.

simply may not have been comfortable with language of "pain."

In contrast to dimensions of unreality (distortion and uncertainty) in interviewees' experiences of failure and rejection, their experiences of pain appeared to be reality in all of its starkness. Moreover, it may be that Fran and other interviewees' easy references to language of "pain" reflected, at least in part, the impact of psychoanalysis on American culture.

Interviewees' language and meanings for shame as pain will be evident through the remainder of this thesis, especially when we turn to preventive strategies of "protecting" in Chapter Four.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to explore the nature of chronic shame and its causes. Two important causes of shame were found to be failure and rejection, and shame was found to be experienced by interviewees both as wrongness and as pain.

Causes of interviewees' chronic shame appeared to include dimensions of distortion and uncertainty. That is, interviewees appeared to experience shame for failing demands which they sensed they had exaggerated in their own minds in some way. Moreover, interviewees experienced shame for rejection they were not certain had even occurred. Understanding these dimensions of unreality may help pastors serve as 'reality checks' to counselees, in helping to alleviate shame.

Moreover, we sought to explore the peculiar roles of psychic and social structures in creating these causes and the resulting shame. Concerning social structures, we

found church norms to supply demands giving rise to failure (and shame) particularly in the case of those interviewees in a conservative church setting. Among the specific demands were clusters of expectations one interviewee felt in her roles as a woman, and expectations another interviewee experienced in his obedience to God.

Concerning psychic structures, we found reason to suspect that these same demands may have been increased through psychic structures to demands of perfection, resulting in frequent failures, and chronic shame. Additionally, as a potential resource for pastoral help, we reflected theologically on interviewees' failure and rejection, especially with respect to the degree to which interviewees saw failure to *mean* rejection, in the context of a biblical scheme of a covenant of works.

Lastly, we considered particular beliefs interviewees expressed in experiences of shame itself. Primarily we noted several interviewees' beliefs, in relation to shame, that they were "wrong." Moreover, two interviewees cited examples in which they appeared to feel implicated in shame for actions of other people over which interviewees themselves had no control (suggesting another dimension of unreality in interviewees' experiences of chronic shame). We also noted interviewees' expressions of pain in describing shame.

Having considered two important causes of chronic shame, and shame itself, we turn in Chapter Four to preventive strategies against chronic shame.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Maintaining Certain Views of Identity and Protecting *Preventive Strategies Against Chronic Shame*

#### Introduction

In Chapter Three, we sought to describe and analyze causes of chronic shame, and shame itself. The two causes discussed were failure and rejection, and particular attention was given to the extent to which these causes were experienced in dimensions of distortion and uncertainty.

Now in Chapter Four, we turn to strategies employed by interviewees to prevent shame. Strauss and Corbin characterize grounded theory as an action/interactional method of theory building. The authors explain, "Whether one is studying individuals, groups, or collectives, there is action/interaction, which is directed at managing, handling, carrying out, responding to a phenomenon as it exists in context...."<sup>1</sup> One way that interviewees engaged in action/interaction in response to chronic shame was to employ preventive strategies against shame. Two important preventive strategies appeared to be protecting against shame's pain and especially, maintaining certain views of identity. Describing and analyzing these preventive strategies forms the primary focus of this chapter.

Concerning interviewees' strategies of maintaining certain views of identity, we will consider both the process of maintaining those views of identity, and the identities

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<sup>1</sup>Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 104.

themselves. Concerning the identities themselves, we will focus on identities which appeared to cluster around notions of Christian piety and also identities which interviewees' seemed to see reflected in their verbal expressions. As in Chapter Three, we will consider the role of apparent psychic and social structures in leading to interviewees preventive strategies. In particular, norms from interviewees' conservative Reformed context appeared to inform "right" identities, which sometimes were invested with perfection possibly through psychological transferences.

Understanding these preventive strategies against shame is expected to be pastorally significant particularly in light of our discussion in Chapter Five of self-estrangement and anxiety as the consequences of these strategies. That is, because these strategies appear to bring negative consequences, counselors may want to help provide counseling environments in which chronic shame sufferers can let go of these identities, developing more helpful and effective strategies for coping with chronic shame. Second, understanding these preventive strategies helps identify barriers to trust, another pastoral issue emerging in relation to chronic shame. These will be among the pastoral issues to which we return in Chapter Six.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyzes interviewees' preventive strategies of protecting against shame's pain. The second section considers interviewees' strategies of maintaining certain views of identity.

## **I. Protecting Against Shame's Pain**

Leon Wurmser, writing from the standpoint of Freudian drive psychology, has argued that the inherent aim of shame is



hiding. One of Wurmser's manifestations of shame is what he calls shame as "preventive attitude," which he summarizes in the statement, "I must always hide and dissemble, in order not to be exposed and disgraced."<sup>2</sup>

Given that one of interviewees' experiences of chronic shame was "pain" (see Chapter Three), perhaps it was not surprising that one way interviewees appeared to seek the type of hiding described by Wurmser was in protecting against that pain.

### **A. Finding a "Safe Place"**

In Chapter Three we considered Matt and Fran's experiences of shame as "pain." In addition to Matt and Fran, Charlene also described shame in terms of pain. In the context of general comments about her relationships with friends and family, Charlene offered this perspective:

When you expose, you leave yourself open for attack. You become vulnerable, and that's an insecure feeling. When you're under cover, it's like a defense; you're safe; you can't be hurt.

Charlene's language of exposure ("open.... vulnerable") and of covering ("under cover.... defense") was language of shame, suggesting shame may have played a part in a number of her relationships. Moreover, Charlene's aim in covering appeared to be to find a "safe" place. where she could not be "hurt." In other words, she appeared to seek protection from painful shame.

Charlene's aim of finding a "safe" place from painful shame was not unlike the apparent aim emerging in a story shared by Keith. Like that in Chapter Three, Keith reflected on a shame experience from his childhood in Korea. After

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<sup>2</sup>Leon Wurmser, "Shame: The Veiled Companion of Narcissism," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, Donald Nathanson (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1987),, p. 68.

describing the pressures in Korean culture for youngsters to do well in school, Keith described his own approach to schoolwork:

I studied very well in junior high, and there were 530 students in the same first year class. Usually, I went third or second, something like that. I never did top; I was third, second or third; it was safe for me; I don't know why I never wanted to become a top, because it must be very lonely I thought, at the top. There is the top, then there's somebody, and then -- it's a safe place, and I was third.

Because standards for success and failure were apparently found in shared social norms, Keith may have known it would be "safe for [him]" if he aimed for an academic rank of second or third. Presumably, he thought that being first would be precarious, and being lower than third might signal failure. Consequently, it appeared that as long as Keith was able to maintain his academic performance at the desired level, he could protect himself from shame. For Charlene, however, securing a "safe" place from shame did not appear so easy. Charlene continued:

But you can only cover for so long because after a while, you end up lonely, and you end up needing somebody else's warmth and companionship. And so, you open up a little bit to let somebody else in, but being human, that person has faults. That person will eventually do something or say something that will either hurt you, or disappoint you. And it makes you want to retreat back under that cover. It makes you regret that you exposed yourself to the vulnerability, the attack...

Recall from Chapter Three the shame Charlene expected to feel if she had been late with dinner that night. Charlene explained that such an incident would "be enough" to cause her to withdraw completely from our relationship. Quite possible this hypothetical withdrawal illustrates the type of "retreat" Charlene describes in the above excerpt.

Moreover, Charlene's suggestion that she will "end up lonely" and in need of "warmth" and "companionship" may reflect Schneider's contention that the person from whom

one feels separated in shame, is one with whom one still wants relationship.<sup>3</sup> Quite possibly for this reason, Charlene had developed a strategy for not only protecting, but apparently making attempts to restore relationship. She offered this example:

You know, you open yourself up to somebody..... like I open myself up to Malcolm, and then he says something, not specifically meaning to, but he says something that hurts me....

Part of Charlene's strategy for protecting herself against shame's pain appeared to be simply realizing that her husband was "not specifically meaning" to hurt her as he did. In addition, however, Charlene went on to explain that after she felt hurt by Malcolm she might tell herself the following:

He loves me. Why would he marry me? Why would he want to stay married to me? Why would he want to spend his life with me -- just to hurt me all the time? I know for a fact that's not him. So the thing is for me to come to terms with that hurtful comment, separate from him, rather than drawing back and saying, "He is that hurtful comment. I'm not going to let him do that to me again." So, I'm gone!<sup>4</sup>

Charlene's belief that the hurtful comment may threaten her marriage -- when she also knew her feelings pertained to a comment her husband was "not specifically meaning" to hurt her by -- would appear to confirm distortion in her experience of rejection and shame, possibly like that described in Chapter Three. More to the point, Charlene appeared to employ a form of self-talk as a strategy against shame, apparently in an attempt to avoid taking her

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<sup>3</sup>Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), pp. 22-25.

<sup>4</sup>Charlene's conclusion that the cause of her hurt was unintentional on her husband's part opening statement "He loves me" revealed that the core threat in shame for her was losing her husband's love. Therefore, a hurtful comment, about whatever issue, ended up threatening (the entire) relationship for Charlene.

husband's comment personally. Concerning the success of her strategy, Charlene offered this glimmer of hope:

(I: Do you find you're able to do that?) (15 second pause) I'm getting better. I'm working on it.

Lastly, while Charlene described a rhythm of emotional opening and then retreat, Fran recalled a different level of emotional protecting as a strategy against the pain of shame:

I have to say, because I think my heart has been in such a hard shell for so long -- not everybody lives in such a hard-shelled heart, I honestly don't think. If they do, I feel really sorry for them. But my heart has been very desensitized by everything. It's only [lately] been becoming more sensitized to life, that is, the process of living

Fran's "hard shell" appeared to be a preventive strategy of an enduring nature in the area of emotions, which may represent a more extreme reaction to protecting against shame's pain than the exposure and retreat of Charlene.

## **B. Taking "Refuge" in God**

While Charlene and Keith spoke in terms of finding a "safe" place to protect from shame's pain, Matt employed different language for a strategy with similar contours of experience. Recall that we met Matt in Chapter Three in the context of being late for church. We further learned of Matt's susceptibility to "barbs" of shame. Matt, too, had a strategy for protecting against these barbs:

If I know my standing is right before the Lord, of course I care about what my brothers and sisters in Christ say about me, uh -- I'm not terribly, I don't have a big plate of armor around me -- however, if they do throw their little barbs at me, I have that refuge; I know that with the one with whom it counts, I know I'm in good standing.

Matt does not say just how God serves as his "refuge." However, Matt's reference to his "good standing" in God's

eyes suggests that he may have found a measure of refuge from "barbs" of shame simply in his own internal sense of his obedience before God. However, given Matt's rage and blaming in reaction to the usher's comment, it may be that it is not always easy for Matt to manage to secure himself in this refuge.

Fran also alluded to a type of refuge in God as a protection against shame's pain. In the context of explaining the healing she felt she was experiencing from shame, Fran made this comment:

God provides a means, like a clothing for us to live, until the time when he chooses to help us see the victory. And for me, all I can say is it provided the best thing in the world for me, which was life -- it was life-giving, because otherwise my life would have ended in high school; I would not have been able to live. But the mere fact that I had it served a purpose in extending my existence several, ten, fifteen years until the time when I really began with Christ. So it was a severe mercy, in a way, but it is a mercy.

It is not clear what Fran considered her "severe mercy" to be. However, her reference to her years in high school suggests that she may now consider the period of time when she was in a "hard shell" to have been God's protective "clothing" for her until she was able to bear the feelings she has begun to more recently experience.

Even now, Fran appears to see God as a protective refuge in her life. She provided this recent example from her experience as teacher of an English class:

It [i.e., what she said to her class] was more carefully constructed. I wasn't willing in my English classes to be who I am, who I am. (I: And why is that?).... There were a lot of belligerents in the English class. And I was unwilling to have my heart be smashed by a number of them, which could have been.

Fran's reference to "belligerents" and having her heart "smashed" again provoked images of shame's pain, suggesting that failure to engage in protecting held serious

consequences. Fran's strategy of "carefully constructed" words manifested itself in one realm in particular:

So it's just as I taught the class, I was very careful. I wouldn't pray. Here I am in a Christian school, and I wouldn't pray with my English classes. (I: Because opening yourself up--) --When I pray, I talk to God, and that's me, 100% me. There's no guardedness in my heart with God. There's no, there's no watchfulness, that carefulness you said with others -- not with God.

Fran's language of "guardedness," "watchfulness" and "carefulness" appeared to signal the constant vigilance required in the protecting process. However, for Fran, this vigilance appeared to be required only with her words to people. By contrast, God appeared to provide a safe haven for her.

To sum up, interviewees' strategies of protecting from shame's pain appeared to include finding a "safe" place by way of emotional retreat from relationships (Charlene and Fran), and in some cases, finding refuge in God. For the remainder of this chapter we turn to a second preventive strategy against shame employed by interviewees, namely maintaining certain views of identity.

## **II. Maintaining "Right" Views of Identity**

The primary preventive strategy discussed and demonstrated by interviewees was maintaining certain views of identity. Several interviewees described these views in terms of some notion of "right" identity. As with demands, discussed in Chapter Three, notions of right identity often appeared to be supplied by interviewees' conservative Reformed settings. In this way these church settings may have unintentionally joined psychic structures in creating chronic shame.



In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman described everyday social interaction as a performance. In this performance, like actors on a stage, people undertake "impression management" by controlling their presentation of selves, and more importantly, other peoples' responses to them. While Goffman's primary concern was to study social interaction, not shame, his work would appear to be a suitable starting point for considering interviewees' second, and primary, preventive strategy against shame, namely maintaining certain views of identity.<sup>5</sup>

### **A. The Process of Controlling the View**

Interviewees described maintaining certain "right" identities as preventive strategies against chronic shame. Before turning in the final section of this chapter to concrete notions of right identity presented, we take up the process by which identities were maintained. This process will also be considered in terms of its implications for trust.

#### **1. "Justifying and Rectifying" and "Clarifying" Identity**

Fran explained her strategy for avoiding shame this way:

You're always having to justify and rectify every single situation that comes into your life, and organize that around people not finding out something about your life. So it's a ray of light that is organized around people not having to look at any kind of shame.

Fran's image of light and darkness orients her description to the visual. Outsiders, she suggests, see the "ray of

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<sup>5</sup>Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1969; first published in U.S.A. by Anchor Books, 1959), pp. 1-14, 183ff.

light" of identity, but are unable to "look at" the surrounding shame, by implication because she has managed to hide it in darkness.

Perhaps most striking about these elements of hiding and revealing is the sharp sense of proportion conveyed by Fran. First, the hiding is constant. Fran says she is "always... [in] every single situation" trying to keep people from "finding out something about [her] life." Second, the hiding is considerably greater than the self-revealing. As if her entire self is a full orb of light, capable of hundreds, or thousands, of rays, Fran described allowing only a (single) "ray of light" to escape, lest people "see... shame."

Fran's image suggests a person whose core identity is formed in shame. The implied image of the orb (of darkness) seems to suggest that were someone to see Fran in unaltered form, they would see shame. Such a view may represent the consequences of what Kaufman calls the "internalization of shame." He writes:

...Internalized shame... forms the foundation around which other feelings about the self will be experienced. This affect-belief lies at the core of the self and gradually recedes from consciousness. In this way, shame becomes basic to the sense of identity.<sup>6</sup>

Charlene described a similar preventive strategy to Fran's strategy. In the context of discussing the onset of an "identity crisis," Charlene explained:

I didn't know who I was. I didn't know who I wanted to be. I didn't know who Malcolm wanted me to be, and I just kept flipping hats constantly through the day, for whatever seemed to suit the moment... (I: Why were you flipping hats during the day?) To please whoever was around me, for fear of them not being able to accept me for who I really was.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

Charlene's desire to "please whoever was around [her]," suggested at least one basis on which correct (or "rectified") identity was selected. Moreover, just as Fran allowed only one ray of light to escape, Charlene wore only one hat of identity at a time, apparently for fear that people would see shame.<sup>7</sup>

While Fran's image of the (single) "ray of light" seemed to emphasize the careful control exercised over public identity, Charlene's image of "flipping hats" seemed to point to the "constant" activity of identity control. Fran put it this way:

[This projection of identity] is different from person to person. How Abigail sees me and knows me is quite different from the way you see me. The gyrations that would go on to justify and keep in perspective what one person thinks about me -- I would certainly want people at my school, the kids at my school, to know only certain things about me.

Goffman suggests that when a person finds him/herself in a situation where the consequences of a social *faux pas* are increased, that person will "pay much attention to his appearance and manner.... [to] forestall any unfavorable impression that might be unwittingly conveyed." For Goffman, such people (and situations) include job applicants (during a job interview), and radio and TV broadcasters.<sup>8</sup>

One wonders if the "gyrations" for Fran may not correspond to the "much attention" of the job applicant, yet without the external circumstances that would normally call for such strenuous impression management. That is, to the extent that this "justifying and rectifying" goes on

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<sup>7</sup>Charlene's sentiment that "who [she] really was" (*italics mine*) would be rejected appeared to be an indication that she believed her strategy presented that which was illusory or unreal. As in Chapter Three, uncertainty and distortion appeared to remain important dimensions of interviewees' experiences.

<sup>8</sup>Goffman, pp. 185, 198-199.

"constantly" it would appear that interviewees may be exaggerating the consequences for failing to maintain tight control on identity. In this way, a link may be possible with causes of shame in Chapter Three, where failures sometimes appeared distorted and rejection appeared uncertain. That is, regarding preventive strategies also, there may be an issue for interviewees in 'misreading' reality.

Returning to the main argument, quite possibly it was "gyrations" like those described by Fran that were employed by Jean, on the phone to her boss:

I mean like just today, I was talking to the President of Ivy-Walls College... and I was just trying to be very careful of what I said, you know....

Jean gave no reason to believe that the circumstances of the conversation were anything but routine. However, she still felt obliged to be "very careful" with what she said. Jean's motive for exercising such care became clearer when she explained, "In this case today, I did not want him to reject me. I did not want him to think I was just the dean of students down there...." In other words, as the dean of students of the college, Jean appeared to feel vulnerable to being seen in some lesser status. Therefore, it would appear that Jean's efforts to be careful with her words were in hopes of justifying her importance as the Dean of Students to him.

Also, it is possible that the "rectifying" described by Fran was not unlike the activity of Matt at one point in our interaction. You may remember from Chapter Three that Matt described a time when he was late for church. Immediately after sharing this event, Matt said,

Again I think you know me well enough that uh -- some may interpret that as a condescending attitude. (I: Not at all. It doesn't come across that way at all.) Good. Okay. Good. Because sometimes, I'm afraid I do. I don't want to.

Matt's appeal to my previous knowledge of him appeared to be an attempt to keep me from thinking he was a "condescending" person. Whether or not this was an instance of "rectifying" identity in my eyes for fear of shame (if I were to think him to be condescending) is difficult to establish from these brief comments. However, given Matt's repeated incurrence of "barbs" of shame, there is reason to suspect shame may have been involved.

To sum up, in the above descriptions, interviewees suggested that an important preventive strategy against chronic shame was to seek to control the view of identity, such that only one view escaped. Components of the process included "justifying" any identity (which might otherwise seem inadequate) and "rectifying" any identity (which might seem to have inappropriately escaped). Moreover, identity may have to be altered from person to person so the process may seem "constant."

However, "justifying and rectifying" identity did not appear to comprise the entire process of controlling views of identity. Jean expressed the following reaction to her telephone conversation with her boss:

...and then when I hung up it's like I felt okay about the conversation, I think, from *his* point of view. (I: Trying to perceive--) --hoping-- (I: --how he perceived you.) Right, right, thinking that in the tone of his voice, and everything else, that he thought this conversation was okay, you know.

Jean's earlier comments about "careful" words revealed a focus on identity measured by her ability to "say it right." However, her concern for maintaining a certain view of identity did not appear to end when the conversation ended. For Jean, the degree to which she had managed to 'say it right' seemed to depend not upon her own sense of the conversation, but rather "*his* point of view."

Not only that, Jean's means of discovering his reaction appeared to be indirect. In this case, it was "the tone of his voice" ("and everything else") by which she tried to perceive his reaction. But there was more. Jean continued:

....today's conversation with him was very comfortable and it was reassuring to me. I mean, he was open with me. I didn't feel any distancing from him. I didn't feel like he was saying, "Hoh ha, I've got to have this conversation with Jean." It was very -- he was contributing. It was very good relation-- I mean, a good conversation. And so, my feeling was, "Well, it was my imagination."

Jean's means of clarifying the success of her identity management appeared to depend on cues that were not only indirect, but predominantly non-verbal. Jean registered not only her boss' tone of voice, but anything else about his manner she could detect. During the conversation that day, Jean assessed that the president's manner was "comfortable," and that he appeared to be "open" and "contributing." At least for the moment, Jean found the signs "reassuring" that he was not rejecting her.<sup>9</sup>

The problem for Jean, however, was that her monitoring for clues did not -- indeed, *could not* -- provide certain answers. Again, we return to Jean's reflections on the conversation:

*I felt okay about the conversation, I think, from his point of view.... I took that as a very positive thing.... He didn't seem at all restrained. He didn't seem distanced.... He seemed very accommodating.... I felt good about that....I wasn't sure....I wasn't really sure (italics mine).*

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<sup>9</sup>In Jean's 'Freudian slip,' "You know, it was a very good relation-- I mean, a good conversation," she suggested how vulnerable she may feel to rejection, even in everyday conversation. It may be that in her mind, their entire relationship was threatened by that day's single encounter. Jean's fear suggests how susceptible are failed preventive strategies to becoming causes of shame.



Jean's liberal use of words of uncertainty (*italicized*) appeared to betray the inconclusiveness of her search. Subjective spheres of tone and manner are destined to provide uncertain answers. Additionally, Jean commented more on what was absent than present, inevitably leading again to uncertain answers. For this reason there was no reason to believe that even after her labor over that day's conversation, that Jean could be certain the president had found her adequate. In this way, "clarifying" identity according to indirect, and predominantly non-verbal, clues appeared to be an unhelpful strategy against chronic shame, and may have simply added to her emotional distress.

However, not all of Jean's attempts at "clarifying" were made in the subjective sphere of personal relationships. For example, with the arrival of the new president, the administrative staff at Jean's college underwent an organizational restructuring. Moreover, when Jean met with some uncertainty about her place in the new plan, she sought clarification of that place by first asking the president. When that attempt was unsatisfying, Jean asked his secretary. When I asked Jean to whom she wanted to report, she explained:

Frankly, I didn't care who I reported to. I just wanted-- (I: --You wanted to know!) Yes! I wanted clarification, so again, I wouldn't do anything wrong! (*said crisply; then laughs heartily*) So I'd do the right thing with the right person.

Jean's aim to avoid doing anything "wrong" may be a reference to shame, like that discussed in Chapter Three. Moreover, it would appear that Jean's primary aim in clarifying her place in the organizational structure was to achieve through official organizational structures what she had been unable to achieve through unofficial relationship structures with the president.

Again to sum up, what appeared to be unfolding in this composite picture provided by interviewees was a reflexive

process not only of efforts to control a certain identity presented through "justifying and rectifying," but to monitor any available signs for clarification of whether or not the identity which other people appeared to see was one about which Jean could conclude was seen to be adequate. Moreover, it may be that this process goes on "constantly" for at least one interviewee suffering from chronic shame.

## **2. Barriers to Trust**

Thus far, we have considered two of interviewees' preventive strategies against shame, namely protecting against shame's pain and maintaining a certain view of identity. In this section, we reflect on implications of these strategies for interviewees' ability to trust (particularly trust God). As was discussed in Chapter Two, for purposes of this thesis, pastoral counseling is understood to occur in the context of a triologue between the counselee, counselor and God. Therefore, considering ways that interviewees' processes of maintaining a certain view of identity influences their experience of God would appear to be theological reflection relevant ultimately to a pastoral response to chronic shame.

At one point during the interview, Fran offered the following reflections on her view of God:

Yeah, I think the shame (pause) all my life (pause) you can't receive if you're feeling in shame! You can't take anything in. And even where God's concerned, you can't receive the Lord. You cannot receive Jesus as a friend, if you're there, because you're still measuring and protecting.... It was always kind of difficult with God because every time he gave me something it hurt like hell.

In addition to "protecting," which we discussed earlier in this chapter, Fran's mention of "measuring" may relate to the process of controlling identity, discussed above. Moreover, in crediting "measuring and protecting" for her

inability to "receive" from God, Fran seemed to raise an issue of trusting God.

The reason Fran gave for not being able to receive from God was that what God had given her before apparently "hurt like hell" (possibly a reference to shame, given Fran's associations between shame and pain). Nevertheless, it is not clear from Fran's description what it was that God had given her that had been so painful. Fran explained more:

...and I never really learned to fully trust him [God] until I understood that... God's authority was nothing like the authority that I had been raised with, but it was actually quite different.

The "authority" Fran had been raised with was imperfect human authority, presumably embodied in people who sexually and emotionally abused her. Moreover, in suggesting that distinguishing God from human authorities in her life had been a key to learning to trust God, Fran seemed to suggest that human authorities had been her model for a God who brought only hurt. With human relationships as a model, therefore, one suspects that what "hurt like hell" from God were any attempts at emotional closeness, which presumably was the context for painful shame perpetrated by her human abusers.

However, Fran's view of God appeared to be changing. She described her revelations about God this way:

For about a year and a couple of months, I've understood for the first time that God is a loving authority, and it's taken me about a year to process what that means -- a loving father, a *compassionate* father, unlike anything -- that the authority in my life is loving and compassionate, and is not, is not weird (*chuckles*). It's something so solid, more solid than life itself solid.

When asked what it was that Fran credited for her recent revelations of God as a "loving authority" and a "compassionate father," she had this to say:

I understood that in the wisdom of God, that God's actions are fully guided by his wisdom and his love and then, then it was shortly after -- *Knowing God, Knowing God* [a book by J. I. Packer]. That was the chapter in *Knowing God* that I had read. And then shortly after that, it was his own revelation to me, personally, in my heart....

To the extent Fran came to understand God through Christian literature and through God's "own revelation" to her, Fran's experience would appear to reflect the individualistic and privatized approach to faith, which has been said to characterize the faith of many Americans today.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, given Fran's suggestion that it had been "human authority" which had caused her to know a God whose gave things which "hurt like hell," one wonders if people were involved in her view of a "compassionate" God also (We will return to this question in Chapter Five, under "Strategies for Reconciliation").

However, there is another factor which may have shaped Fran's view of God, and that is her church tradition. As already mentioned, Fran was a member of Fringes Presbyterian Church, and evidence in the preceding excerpts (and elsewhere) of her willingness to speak of God, suggested she thought of her life in religious terms. While we do not know at this point the extent to which Fringes Presbyterian Church's doctrine may have played a role in Fran's chronic shame and barriers to trusting God, considering this possibility would appear to be important.

Over the years, the Reformed tradition has been criticized for presenting a sovereign God at the expense of presenting

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<sup>10</sup>The authors of *Habits of the Heart* (1985) have noted that a trend toward privatized religion is widespread in America. They write, "Today religion in America is as private and diverse as New England colonial religion was public and unified." They go on to suggest the possibility of 220 million religions in America, one for each American. Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), pp. 220-221.

a loving God. This argument has been made by those within and without the tradition. Again, concerning the official doctrinal position of Fringes Presbyterian, we turn to the Westminster Confession.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, four leading Presbyterian theologians wrote a series of articles published in *The Presbyterian* devoted to consider some revisions to the Westminster Confession. Henry Van Dyke was among those calling for revisions to the confession making more explicit declarations of God's love.<sup>11</sup> Among two truths "as clear as the sun" in Christian theology, Van Dyke saw not only God's sovereignty, but God's love for all humankind, even "those who perish in their sins." For Van Dyke, "The true Calvinist holds both and insists they are consistent."<sup>12</sup>

A contrasting view was taken by Benjamin Warfield. Warfield believed a God of love was already represented in the Confession. To Van Dyke's complaints, Warfield wrote:

It is frequently objected again that the [Westminster] Confession makes too little relatively of the love of God and too much relatively of His sovereignty, and thus reverses the emphasis of the Bible. The framers of the Confession are not responsible, however, for this separation of God's love and sovereignty; to them His sovereignty seemed a loving sovereignty, and His love a sovereign love....

Warfield's argument appeared to center on the nature of love. To Warfield, sovereignty was an expression of love.

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<sup>11</sup>Henry J. Van Dyke served as pastor of the Brick Church in New York City (1883-1900); professor of English literature at Princeton University; moderator of the General Assembly (1902). *Encyclopedia of The Reformed Faith*, Donald K. McKim, ed. and David F. Wright, cons. ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), s. v. "van Dyke, Henry (1852-1933)" by Lindajo H. McKim.

<sup>12</sup>Henry J. Van Dyke, "God's Infinite Love to Men," in *Ought the Confession of Faith To Be Revised? A Series of Papers by John De Witt, Henry J. Van Dyke, Benjamin B. Warfield and Wm. G. Shedd* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1890), pp. 116-117.



Regardless, the real issue appeared to be the absence of explicit language of "love." Warfield continued:

It is perfectly true that they [the framers of the Confession] seldom make use of the term "love"; but this is due to the exactness of their phraseology, by which they prefer to speak of God's "goodness" and "grace" -- by the one of which terms they designate His general love and by the other His special love for His people..... There is certainly no lack of emphasis on God's love here; though no doubt it is His sovereign love that is emphasized.<sup>13</sup>

For whatever reason, the Westminster Confession of Faith was not revised to include explicit language of God's love, leaving Fringes Presbyterian Church without a confessional statement with language of God's love.<sup>14</sup>

Again, it is difficult to know the extent to which doctrinal statements impact a single individual's view of

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<sup>13</sup>Benjamin Warfield, *On the Revision of the Confession of Faith* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1890), pp. 25-26.

<sup>14</sup>It should be said that the PCUSA (the denomination of Uptown Presbyterian Church), some seventy years after this debate over the Westminster Confession, sought to address this very issue in adding to its official confessions the Confession of 1967. In the spirit of continuing to reform the confessions to speak to the contemporary setting, the Confession of 1967 was devoted to the theme of reconciliation, because as the Introduction to the Confession reads, "Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ." While not denying God's sovereignty, the Confession places considerable emphasis on God's love. A section entitled, "The Love of God," the only section on the doctrine of God, begins with these words:

God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of man's mind. Human thought ascribes to God superlatives of power, wisdom, and goodness. But God reveals his love in Jesus Christ by showing power in the form of a servant, wisdom in the folly of the cross, and goodness in receiving sinful men. The power of God's love in Christ to transform the world discloses that the Redeemer is the Lord and Creator who made all things to serve the purpose of his love.

God's sovereignty is mentioned just once in the confession, and neither election nor predestination is mentioned explicitly. The Confession of 1967 in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 9.01-9.06, 9.15.



God, although there is some reason to expect that this doctrine does shape preaching and teaching at Fringes Presbyterian Church. Fran's own testimony appeared to be that she had come to know God through the example of human beings, and these people may include fellow churchmembers. Regardless, the preceding discussion would appear to reveal that to the extent doctrinal statements do shape peoples' attitudes toward God, then Fringes Presbyterian Church may not have served as much of an influence to counter Fran's picture of an unloving God.

Fran was not the only interviewee who appeared to find strategies against shame, or shame itself, to erect barriers to trusting God. During a discussion with me and her friend Abigail about her experience of sin, Charlene offered this view of her conception of God:

Charlene: For instance, Abigail is my dearest friend, and if I was to lie to her, I would regret it, but I would -- *(turning to Abigail)* I've never lied to you so I can't -- *(Abigail laughs in background)*.

Abigail: -- Well that's good to know.

C: Yeah, but if I had, I couldn't come to you and admit it, because I feel like I'm not worthy of the possibility of you forgiving me.

A: Can I ask a question? What happens if you put God in my place?

C: God's this -- God's this nebulous type being to me. Jesus is the --

A: --Okay, put Jesus in my place. Same scenario.

C: I could do it in prayer, but I couldn't do it face to face.

Charlene's description of God as a "nebulous type being" appeared to point to a God who was impersonal. Elsewhere in the interview, Charlene explained more:

Part of the self-esteem and not measuring up that I feel -- a large part of it is when I pray -- I do not pray as often as I should, or as often as I even would

like to -- and one of the main things that keeps me from praying is that God's too busy to listen to me.<sup>15</sup>

Charlene's feeling of "not measuring up" before God suggests she may feel chronic shame in God's eyes, resulting in an experience of God as a God who is "too busy to listen to [her]." Combining an apparent impersonal God ("nebulous") with a God to whom she has little access ("too busy to listen..."), Charlene provided a picture of a God with whom she appeared to experience little relationship. Therefore, while chronic shame appeared to create for Fran a punitive God, shame appeared to create for Charlene a distant, or even remote, God.

Some have argued that Reformed theology itself has presented a remote God. Turning to the writings of William Selbie (onetime principal of Mansfield College, Oxford) who stood formally within the Calvinist tradition, we read,

The whole Calvinistic system is built on the idea of God's greatness and remoteness from man. He is an absolute sovereign, and His arbitrary will governs all things.... Grace is also predicated of Him, but it is the graciousness of a sovereign rather than the love of a Father.<sup>16</sup>

Brian Gerrish has argued that Selbie and others like him have misunderstood Calvin. Gerrish goes on to re-interpret Calvin's God around the images of goodness and parental care. In arguing for Calvin's central conception of God as the fountain of all good, Gerrish quotes Calvin's opening paragraph of *The Institutes* (1559), which reads, "By these good things (*bonis*), shed upon us drop by drop from heaven, we are led, as if by rivulets, to the fountain (*ad*

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<sup>15</sup>Charlene's confession that she does "not pray as often as [she] should, or... would like to" suggests that prayer may serve as a demand for her, potentially resulting in failure and shame.

<sup>16</sup>W. B. Selbie, *The Fatherhood of God* (London: Duckworth, 1936), pp. 75-76. Taken from B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 22.

fontem)." <sup>17</sup> Gerrish goes on to combine this image with a more dominant later theme in the *Institutes* of God's parental care in concluding, "Not the divine despot, but the Parent-God, who is goodness itself, was the object of Calvin's piety and therefore, the main theme of his doctrine of God." <sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, Calvinism does emphasize a chasm separating God and humankind. Namely, God is supreme and humankind is utterly and totally depraved. Returning to the Westminster Confession, the beginning lines of "Of God, and the Holy Trinity" read:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty....

By contrast the Westminster Confession provides this description of humankind:

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

The Confession goes on to say that this corruption remains in this life even in the regenerate person. Therefore, even among Christians, the chasm of contrasting natures (God vs. humankind) is to some extent still unbridged (this side of heaven). <sup>19</sup>

Again, we can not tell the degree to which the doctrinal statements of Fringes Presbyterian Church may have contributed to Charlene's view of God as "nebulous" and

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<sup>17</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1960), I, i, 36. Taken from Gerrish, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup>Gerrish, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 6.034.

"too busy to listen." Charlene, herself, may not even know what is in the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, to the extent that such doctrine informs preaching and teaching -- which it does at Fringes Presbyterian Church -- then over time, it is likely to influence the corporate and individual lives of church members. We will again turn to issues of trusting God in Chapter Six.

To sum up, there is some reason to believe that interviewees' protecting and controlling strategies reflect barriers to trusting God. Moreover, to the extent that Reformed theology has presented God as unloving and distant, then the tradition would appear to have done little to remove such barriers (and could have contributed to them). However, this is not all of the story with respect to the Reformed tradition. We turn next to an important feature of the doctrine of God from the Reformed tradition which may prove to be a resource for Fran and Charlene in coming to know a God who is not punitive and distant.

Part of the nature of God which is central to Reformed theology and yet which appeared to be undermined by Fran's "measuring and protecting" strategies and by Charlene's feeling of "never measuring up" is God's providence. The Larger Catechism defines God's providence this way:

Q. 11 What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.<sup>20</sup>

God's governing of "all his creatures" and "all their actions" suggests that above all, God is involved in peoples' lives. In his book *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, John Leith puts it this way,

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<sup>20</sup>The Larger Catechism in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 7.011.

Popular estimates of the Reformed tradition have always identified it with the sovereignty of God and with predestination. This popular estimate has good basis in fact. While efforts to identify Calvinism with a central doctrine from which others are deduced have all failed, a case can be made that the central theme of Calvinist theology, which holds it all together, is the conviction that every human being has every moment to do with the *living* God.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, according to Leith, the Reformed tradition knows nothing of a God who is uninvolved in a believer's life (in spite of the chasm between God and humankind). Yet Charlene knew only a remote God.

It could be that the doctrine of God's providence can be a meaningful resource for Charlene for moving toward an ability to trust. Calvin saw providence to be the source of considerable trust on the part of the believer. In a paragraph entitled, "Certainty about God's providence puts joyous trust toward God in our hearts," Calvin writes:

Yet, when that light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxiety and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care. For as he justly dreads fortune, so he fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it. Moreover, it comforts him to know that he has been received into God's safekeeping and entrusted to the care of his angels, and that neither water, nor fire, nor iron can harm him, except in so far as it pleases God as governor to give them occasion.<sup>22</sup>

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it more succinctly:

Q.28. What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?

A. We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future,

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<sup>21</sup>John H. Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1977 and 1981), p. 70.

<sup>22</sup>Calvin, I, xvii, 11.

assured that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot even move.<sup>23</sup>

Again, the preceding discussion was aimed at providing a flavor of interviewees' doctrinal context, a context which may have contributed to interviewees' chronic shame and resulting barriers to trusting God. Equally, it aimed to introduce one of the important resources from the Reformed tradition which may be helpful in breaking down those barriers to trust. In Chapter Six we will again consider the place of church doctrine in breaking down barriers to trust.

## **B. "Right" Identities**

Having considered the process of maintaining certain views of identity, we now turn to interviewees' concrete notions and expressions of "right" identity. As with previous analysis, we will consider the roles of apparent psychological as well as social structures in creating interviewees' experiences.

These notions of "right" identity clustered under two headings, namely right notions of piety and right expressions of words.

### **1. "Right" Notions of Piety**

Fran was among interviewees to maintain certain views of identity as a strategy against shame. When asked what those identities were, Fran offered this explanation:

For a long time, it was always being right, having to be right, because my mother had reduced me to nothing. So I always had to give her a picture...[of] having to be right.

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<sup>23</sup>The Heidelberg Catechism in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 4.028.



Being "right" was a term commonly used by interviewees to describe their notions of identity, leading to its use as an organizing theme for these identities. Quite possibly, being "right" was designed to defend against the shame of being "wrong," described in Chapter Three. When asked to give an example of "having to be right," Fran recounted the following event:

...knowledge, whatever knowledge, knowledge (pause) I remember Jason [Fran's friend] pushing me all the way to the end of something I couldn't answer. I could have crumbled.... (I: To push you to the point of saying--) --I don't know. Not only do I not know, but he was able to detect that -- he's a mad scientist type -- even the process of logic from which I even begin. And it just, it ripped, it ripped a whole root out of me. And I thought to myself, "I will never expose myself like that again, ever !".... So the shame was intense.

Fran's 'intense shame' for not having "right" knowledge appeared to be another example of shame arising from exaggerated demands, like that described in Chapter Three. Yet in this case, Fran revealed another dimension of her experience. After mentioning that the type of knowledge involved was "theological stuff," I asked Fran why she thought she reacted the way she did:

I know why. Because I had nothing else to base my life on, nothing at that point, except my knowledge of God.

Given Fran's conservative Reformed church connection, "knowledge of God" may have meant primarily knowledge gained from the Bible. Conservative theologian Donald Bloesch writes in *Evangelical Essentials* that "Scriptural primacy" characterizes the evangelical movement, leaving some reason to suspect that the Fringes Church community was a source of this norm. Bloesch goes on to describe the evangelical biblical hermeneutic as a rational, propositional approach to the truth, suggesting Fran's

emphasis on "knowledge" to correspond to her conservative tradition's biblical approach.<sup>24</sup>

More to the point, "knowledge of God" was functioning in Fran's life as the very "base" of her life. When that knowledge was found (in Fran's estimation) to be wanting, it "ripped a whole root" out of her. Therefore, apparently for Fran, the stakes of failing such norms were exceedingly high, threatening an attack on the core of her identity.

The case of Matt may provide further insight. Recall from Chapter Three that Matt described shame as "barbs" (and "zingers"). Now as it relates to preventive strategies against those "barbs," Matt went on to say:

Well, I think the barb is when someone basically questions my commitment, and I know my commitment is fine. I know my commitment is in the right place, and I'm doing exactly what he [God] wants me to do.

It would seem that because "commitment" readily describes people (more than actions), there may be some identity reference in this term for Matt, possibly pointing to an identity he seeks to maintain. Moreover, Matt's insistence that he is doing exactly what God wants him to do hints that *perfection* may characterize this "commitment" for him. A reference to perfection with regard to identity on Fran's part was more explicit. Immediately following her comment

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<sup>24</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978 - vol. 1, 1979 - vol. 2), I, 51-64, 75-78.

As suggested in the Introduction to this thesis, George Marsden places Scriptural primacy at the heart of what it means to be an evangelical. "Evangelicalism, as I am using it here," writes Marsden, "refers to that broad movement, found especially in British and American Protestantism, 'that insisted that the sole authority in religion is the Bible and the sole means of salvation is a life-transforming experience wrought by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.'"

George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1991), p. 125. Quotation taken from Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1985), p. 17.

about "right" knowledge, Fran said, "[Another "picture" of herself] would have to be perfectionism...."

A clue to the functioning of these identities (of perfection) would appear to be found in Heinz Kohut's concept of idealizing transferences. Recall that we first introduced Kohut's notion of transferences into analysis in Chapter Three under "Inattention and Indifference." There we considered Jean and Charlene's experiences in light of Kohut's theory of mirror transferences (the other of his two types of selfobject transferences).

To recap Kohut's theory, transferences are the self's attempts to repair its own fragmentation by merging with an 'object' in its surrounding social world. In contrast to a mirror transference, where a person invests him/herself with an unusual degree of 'specialness' (grandiosity), Kohut writes that an idealizing transference is recognized by a person's investment of *other* (people) with perfection and omnipotence, in an attempt to merge with some image of perfection (a merger usually fulfilled in early self development by nurturing parents; however when unfulfilled in early life, the search continues into adulthood).<sup>25</sup> Kohut interpreter Michael St. Clair writes that idealizing transferences are aptly captured in the phrase "You are perfect, but I am part of you."<sup>26</sup>

In the example given by Matt, it is possible that an idealizing transference was in effect between him and God. We cannot confirm this from brief information provided, but

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<sup>25</sup>Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*, The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Monograph 4, man. eds. Ruth S. Eissler, Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann, Marianne Kris and Seymour L. Lustman (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, Inc., 1971), pp. 37-56.

<sup>26</sup>Michael St. Clair, *Objects Relations and Self Psychology: An Introduction* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1986), p. 151.

there are a few suggestions that point in this direction. First, it should be said that although God would seem to be a highly suitable 'object' for someone seeking merger with a 'perfect' and 'omnipotent' figure, that this in itself is no evidence that such a merger has taken place with Matt. However, Matt does hint that he sees God and himself in close partnership ("I'm doing exactly what he [God] wants me to do"). More distinctive than this, however, is Matt's conspicuous reference to doing "exactly" what God wants him to do (an apparent allusion to perfection). A similar inference came out elsewhere in Matt's comment that "with the one with whom it counts [God], I *know* I'm in good standing" (*italics mine*).

Again, more evidence would be needed to establish that an idealizing transference between Matt and God had taken place. However, if such a transference had taken place, indicating that Matt had identified his understanding of himself with the perfections of God, then an implication is that Matt would have an unusual degree of identity invested in failures to achieve the perfection he requires of himself. Therefore, one might more easily understand Matt's keen sensitivity to expectations he appeared to think other people have of him in realms of obedience and other expressions of piety.

Returning to Fran's example of "right" knowledge, we note first that right knowledge is not a person, presumably suggesting that it could not serve as an idealizing transference. However, in Kohut's later writings he was to suggest that idealizing transferences occurred not only with people but with 'objects' from one's "culture." The clue to a transference apparently is the investment of identity in that 'object' of perfection, leaving open the

possibility that Fran's "right" knowledge on which she "based her life" was such a transference also.<sup>27</sup>

Even if an idealizing transference had not occurred, interviewees' identifications with notions of Christian piety would appear to be strong, and would appear to have shaped their sense of identity. Moreover, it would appear that interviewees' "right" views of identity may have had component parts. Consider some possibilities concerning Matt's view of himself as "committed." For example, Matt provided this example from his experiences as a schoolteacher:

There was a lady [another schoolteacher] one time, who had the room next to me, and I said something one time -- I thought she was someone I could communicate with a little bit about Christian things. She told me what church she went to and this type thing. So I said something about -- she had a rough day or something -- and I said, "Well, I'll say a few words for you, and I glanced up." And she just turned to me and she said, "Don't push it, Matt! (Matt laughs) Get out of here!"

Matt's mention that he would "say a few words" for the teacher appeared to be an allusion to prayer, a word some form of which Matt used nineteen times during our hour-long interview. Additionally, Matt was in charge of the church prayer ministry, gathering with a group of people early on Sunday mornings to pray for the worship service and gathering people at other times to pray for specific needs. Returning to the story, now with Matt's offer of prayer having been rejected, he reacted as follows:

I just backed off, and I left, and I thought to myself, "Lord, did I really blow it? Was I really pushing too hard?" You get that sort of sense, that sense almost as if the enemy recounts that on to me and says, "You blew it, man. You pushed that gal too hard. You missed out. She's going to hate your guts. You've lost your witness with her." And that was the kind of zonkers I got.

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<sup>27</sup>Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach*, ed. Charles B. Strozier (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985), pp. 224-231.



Matt's reference to "zonkers" and the mild identity content in his self-attacks such as "You blew it man" suggested some shame in his reaction to the schoolteachers' words. This, then, is what Matt said to me next:

And I pray for her, so that was to me a clue to pray like mad!".... You see, well this was the thing. My first reaction was critical. But I think with the indwelling spirit of God within me, that I can pray and have that kind of attitude of prayer, praying in a situation like that, rather than feeling resentment toward that person.

It is possible that these last comments of Matt's had more to do with his interaction with me, the interviewer, than with the schoolteacher. Given that I was a regular attender at Fringes Church, Matt may have felt vulnerable in my eyes after just sharing a story where he had been rebuked by a work colleague with whom he thought he could speak about "Christian things." It is possible that Matt's five references to prayer in a relatively short span of dialogue was his strategy to re-establish his "commitment" in my eyes (as interviewer).<sup>28</sup>

Recalling Matt's apparent attempts to ensure that he did not appear "condescending" in my eyes, and also his attempts to ensure that he did not come across like a "pious Pharisee," the picture of Matt's attempts to maintain a view of himself as "committed" appeared to have a variety of component parts. This may also have been the case for other interviewees, such as Barbara, who described

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<sup>28</sup>Matt explained elsewhere to me that when a person did throw a "barb" of shame at him, he was likely to respond as follows:

I have no problem with that, and I take those things as a signal from the Lord to, perhaps, pray for the other person. I know -- I say this at the risk of sounding like one of those pious Pharisees (laughs hesitatingly).

Again, this is to suggest the possibility that reasserting his commitment to prayer may have been part of Matt's preventive strategy against chronic shame.



her attempts to be "holy" as a preventive strategy against shame (to be discussed in Chapter Five), and Fran, in her attempts to maintain of view of herself as biblically knowledgeable.

To sum up, thus far we have suggested that "right" identities in relation to Christian piety appeared to include for two interviewees, that of having "right" theological knowledge and of being "committed" (and also "holy"). Moreover, we drew upon Heinz Kohut's theory of idealizing transferences to suggest one possibility for explaining the apparent conferring of perfection to those people or pursuits which interviewees used to shape these identities.

Among the implications of the preceding discussion would appear to be a possible reason why chronic shame sufferers may tend to choose conservative churches. First, recall from Chapter Three that Kelley has characterized conservative churches by the demands they place on their members. On the one hand, the greater demands of conservative church environments would appear to promise chronic shame sufferers more failures, suggesting these people would avoid such environments. On the other hand, however, these demands may be perceived to promise more opportunities for merger with ideal figures, offering a promise of re-activating the developmental process never completed as a young child, and repairing fragmented self structures.

Perhaps, for example, the clear support that Fringes Church held for knowing about God through the Bible led Fran to know that this was one area (theological knowledge) in which merger with perfection was possible. However, this merger promised freedom from shame only as long as she could maintain this identity, and we know from the foregoing discussion that Fran was not always able to. In

their repeated experiences of shame, other interviewees would appear to have met a similar result; therefore, the promise of finding the needed ideal figure which could indeed complete the self restoration process, appeared to be a illusory one.

To sum up, in the above discussion we explored the extent to which Reformed church norms appeared to supply "right" identities used by interviewees as preventive strategies against chronic shame. Moreover, we considered the extent to which an additional dimension of perfection in interviewees' identities might be explained in terms of idealizing transferences. The specific identities we considered were having "right" theological knowledge, being "committed" to God, and being "holy." Next, we turn from identities related to Christian piety, to identities reflected in interviewees' expressions with words.

## **2. "Right" Expressions of Words**

In the previous section we discussed "right" identities described by interviewees in terms of notions of Christian piety. Next we turn to right identities interviewees appeared to see reflected in interviewees' expressions with words. Recall Jean's description of her conversation that day with her boss:

I mean like just today, I was talking to the President of Ivy-Walls College... and I was just trying to be very careful of what I said, you know, to say it right, to be brief and succinct, and not waste his time, and you know, ask what I need to ask....

The way Jean understood to "say it right" was surprisingly similar to Charlene's concerns at one point in our interview. Note the following interchange:

Charlene: Are we giving you the information that you need?

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Abigail: Is that the perfectionist speaking in you, wanting to do it right?

Malcolm: That's exactly right!

Charlene: Well, I don't want to waste his time, and I want to give him what he wants.

Jean and Charlene's mutual aim to not "waste his time" (i.e., the time of their conversation partners) appeared to put a focus on efficiency of words. This focus appeared only to be underscored when Jean mentioned her aim to be "brief and succinct" (and possibly also when Charlene mentioned her desire to "give [me] what [I] wanted").

It is possible that some larger societal or cultural trends have had an impact on Jean and Charlene's notion of saying it "right." Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* has argued that we are in a postmodern age characterized by the increasing importance and changing face of knowledge. Whereas narrative knowledge characterized knowledge of past centuries, now under the influence of technological power, scientific knowledge is dominant in postmodernity.<sup>29</sup>

For Lyotard, this scientific knowledge is above all, a kind of discourse, and this discourse is characterized by efficiency.<sup>30</sup> In describing the way technology has shaped scientific discourse, Lyotard writes:

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<sup>29</sup>Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, fore. Fredric Jameson, Theory and History of Literature Series, vol. 10 (of ten vols.) (Manchester, England: The Manchester University Press, 1984, first publ. 1979 by Les Editions de Minuit), pp. xxiii-xxv,

<sup>30</sup>In support of his contention that popular scientific study is all about language, Lyotard cites this list of "leading" sciences and technologies:

....phonology and theories of linguistics, problems of communication and cybernetics, modern theories of algebra and informatics, computers and their languages, problems of translation and the search for areas of compatibility among computer languages, problems of information storage and data

This is where technology comes in. Technical devices... follow a principle, and it is the principle of optimal performance: maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process). Technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc., but to efficiency: a technical "move" is "good" when it does better and/or expends less energy than another.<sup>31</sup>

As one who distrusts metanarratives, Lyotard does not see scientific language as the only language game; however, where it is used, its 'rules' are characterized by efficiency.

Lyotard has been criticized for seeing language games to embody conflictual relationships between "tricksters."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, alternative views have been suggested to explain the modern emphasis on efficiency. Jacques Ellul, for example, has traced trends toward efficiency to the modern emphasis on technique. For Ellul, technique began with the machine, but has grown in ways which now have no relation to the machine.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, Ellul would appear to disagree in principle with Lyotard's view that it is technology which continues to drive efficiency. Nevertheless, both theorists have concluded a trend to efficiency is recognizable on a broad scale in the West. While we do not know why Jean and Charlene emphasized efficient words, it is worth noting

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banks, telematics and the perfection of intelligent terminals, paradoxology.

Lyotard, pp. 3-4.

<sup>31</sup>Lyotard, p. 44.

<sup>32</sup>Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (Hemel, Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, a division of Simon & Schuster International Group), p. 120.

<sup>33</sup>Jacques Ellul, "The Technological Society," *Technology and Man's Future*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, ed. Albert H. Teich (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp. 40-42.

that it is possible that they have been influenced by societal trends.

Matt also was concerned to say it right. The day after our interview was Sunday. After the morning church service, Matt came up to me and reiterated that the taped interview was not something he wanted other people to hear, not because he was concerned about exposing the interview content, but because he was not proud of his "choppy sentences." He went on to say that usually when he is taped, he is able to make his sentences more "eloquent." In addition to Matt's behavior, it is possible that the quality of words was also an issue for Sylvia in her concern about the quality of her sermon ("I have just preached the worst sermon! I wish the earth would open and swallow me up.").

Returning to Lyotard's analysis, there may be another strand linking interviewees' emphasis on words and our discussion of the impact of the technological age. Lyotard's comments on efficiency come in the context of his comments on performativity. According to Lyotard, because in the input/output equation of technology, *proof* instead of truth, is valued, then in this way technology has mediated a spirit of performativity.<sup>34</sup> It would seem that interviewees' focus on their words, both in terms of efficiency and quality, as a mediation of identity raises the question of whether interviewees' views of identity have been reduced to performativity, i.e., talking.

Perhaps one of the more comprehensive demonstrations of the way words may be seen to reflect identity was that provided by Matt. Earlier we suggested that Matt appeared to try to maintain an identity of being "committed" as a preventive strategy against shame. Matt's attempt to be committed may have been most evident in his choice of words. For

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<sup>34</sup>Lyotard, pp. 41ff.

example, during our hour-long interview, Matt mentioned more than once each the words "obedience," "forgiveness," and "standing before God." His friends were "brothers and sisters in Christ." Twenty-six times he referenced the "Lord," and nineteen times he mentioned "prayer."

Based on the above analysis, it would seem plausible that to the extent that interviewees do think that the views of their identity can be restricted by controlling their words, then they may underestimate the significance of non-verbal communication in social relationships.

Ironically, in spite of their efforts to produce quality and efficient words, interviewees demonstrated phases of marked inability with words, probably not commensurate with their general abilities (even with language). Although the interview excerpts presented in this thesis do not contain all "um's" and pauses (in order to enhance comprehensibility), the following was not untypical language for Jean:

Then my daughter.... She's adopted also, but I never bonded with my son, but with my daughter I bonded, at an early age, and I just would not let her go. I mean, I would not let her (pause) how can I say? I would not, I would not reject her -- granted I had reason to! -- but I would not reject her, as I did -- that would have been the final straw in her life to confirm that she was no good (pause) that she, you know, and I just would not let that happen, and um, I loved her! (pause) and that's just and, and so, she's twenty-three now, and um (pause) two years ago now -- I don't know how many years, three, five years ago (pause) whatever, in more recent years, as more of an adult, we talked about that time, and she said, "I just hated you. I hated you, and you just kept loving me and kept loving me. And I just hated you."....

It might be worth speculating that Jean's choppy sentences, featuring *phrases* as much as complete sentences, may be an attempt to draw back on the complete exposure of identity (by way of words) even as she is providing rather revealing information. The fewer the words, the less chance of an



unintended portion of identity escaping, resulting in shame. However, Jean's concern to accurately pinpoint the thought about not rejecting her daughter, along with her brief pre-occupation with being as accurate as possible about the number of years ago that this conversation occurred, points to the way efforts to 'chase perfection' in her words may end up compromising her comprehensibility. Regardless of speculations concerning the reason, Jean's choppy, wordy expression was characteristic not only of her, but of other interviewees, in varying degrees, also.

To sum up, interviewees' right identities appeared to include notions of Christian piety and their expressions with words. While there may be other notions of right identity, these were two important ones expressed by interviewees.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we considered preventive strategies against chronic shame. Two important strategies described by interviewees were protecting against shame's pain, and primarily, maintaining certain views of identity.

Interviewees' strategies of protecting against shame's pain appeared to involve strategies of complete emotional retreat (into a "hard shell") and periodic emotional withdrawal. Moreover, two interviewees sought to take "refuge" in God, including through prayer.

The primary preventive strategy against shame discussed in this chapter was interviewees' attempts to maintain certain views of identity. The process by which various interviewees sought to maintain these identities included a reflexive process of "justifying and rectifying" their views of identity to other people, and then "clarifying"

ways identity appeared to be received. Moreover, we considered ways that this process of controlling the view of identity, along with protecting against pain, reflected barriers to trusting God. Understanding such barriers helps identify issues of trust as one area in which a pastoral response to chronic shame may be directed.

Additionally, we considered specific views of identity interviewees sought to maintain. First, these views included notions of Christian piety, such as being seen to be "committed" and to be theologically knowledgeable. We went on to consider ways psychic structures may have increased interviewees' investment of identity in these church norms through idealizing transferences. Second, these views also included expressions of right words. In this case, we considered ways that larger societal trends toward efficiency and performativity may have played a part in influencing interviewees to focus on certain forms of expression as a view of identity.

In Chapter Three we analyzed shame and its causes, and in Chapter Four we have discussed preventive strategies against shame. In Chapter Five we will turn our attention to consequences of preventive strategies against shame, and of shame itself.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Self-Estrangement and Anxiety *Consequences of Preventive Strategies Against Shame, and of Shame Itself*

#### Introduction

In Chapter Four we discussed interviewees' preventive strategies against chronic shame. The primary strategy discussed was maintaining certain views of identity. A second strategy considered was that of protecting against shame's pain.

In this chapter, we seek to describe and analyze the consequences of those preventive strategies, and of shame itself. Two primary consequences described by interviewees were self-estrangement and anxiety. First, self-estrangement appeared to manifest itself as lost identity and as estranged feelings and desires. To the extent self-estrangement was a consequence of interviewees' preventive strategies against shame (described in Chapter Four), self-estrangement would appear to suggest these strategies to be *unhelpful*. We will also consider ways interviewees sought to be reconciled to lost identities, including their use of resources from their conservative Reformed tradition. These strategies serve to inform pastoral responses to chronic shame, considered in Chapter Six.

Second, anxiety appeared to manifest itself as a consequence of failing to maintain certain views of identity. Because anxiety often contained, or gave way to shame affect, anxiety would appear to suggest instances when interviewees' preventive strategies against shame were *ineffective*. Moreover, in response to resulting shame, interviewees described an additional preventive strategy against shame, namely withdrawing from view.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, understanding these largely negative consequences of interviewees' preventive strategies would appear to have pastoral significance in terms of helping chronic shame sufferers begin to substitute effective strategies for the ineffective ones. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes and analyzes self-estrangement. The second section describes and analyzes anxiety and withdrawal.

In this chapter, in addition to interviewees to whom you have already been introduced, you will meet "Pam," whose apparent experiences of chronic guilt, provide a contrast with other interviewees' experiences of chronic shame.

## **I. Self-Estrangement**

In this first section of Chapter Six, we will consider the experiences of self-estrangement as a consequence of interviewees' preventive strategies against shame and of shame itself. In particular, we will consider the experiences of those interviewees who appeared to experience their identities to have been lost or altered. Also, we will consider the experiences of two interviewees, whose self-estrangement significantly involved their feelings and desires.

Additionally, we will consider interviewees' strategies for achieving reconciliation with the identities (or portions of identity) and the feelings and desires from which they believed themselves to be estranged. These and other issues form the focus of this first section of Chapter Five.

## A. Lost Identities

Pastoral theologian Donald Capps begins his discussion of the "divided self" (one of Capps' three "problematics of the self") with these words: "We have seen that, in the shame experience, the self experiences itself as divided or split." Capps goes on to describe how when one feels shame, one experiences the division between the real self, which did the acting, and the ideal self, whose expectations were failed.<sup>1</sup>

Capps' theory is based on a Kohutian analysis which purports that one feels divided during shame because one's self structures are indeed divided. If Capps is right, then according to principles of grounded theory, dividedness should be considered a *condition* of shame. Nevertheless, it was not always apparent whether interviewees considered self-estrangement a condition, a consequence or an experience co-incident with shame. For interviewees, self-estrangement appeared to consist in all three. Nevertheless, interviewees often appeared to discuss self-estrangement in terms of consequences. Therefore, we have included self-estrangement in this discussion of *consequences* of chronic shame.

Recall from Chapter Four that Fran described projecting one ray of identity to people around her, so they would not have to see shame ("So it's a ray of light that is organized around people not having to look at any kind of shame...."). Fran went on to describe what she believed was the consequence of her strategy:

...So I would organize my whole personality to them around a certain image of myself, and in a way, that's denying a whole series -- whole areas -- of a person's life.... I'm still segmented. I'm not a whole person because there are things still that I am not accepting

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 87.

as part of who I am.<sup>2</sup>

Fran's indication that "denying" areas of her life resulted from her strategy of organizing public identity would seem to suggest that she saw her sense of being "segmented," at least in part, as a consequence of her strategy against shame. Moreover, Fran's concern for accepting those things that were part of "who I am" suggested that she may have felt her dividedness had separated her from her true identity. Fran provided this example of being "segmented":

And when I had gone through counseling for sexual abuse for about a year, I had gone from a place where I simply could not even look at myself. Still to this day I don't spend any time in front of the mirror, because I hate what I see.... So as I said shame was playing a very big part of my life, for a long time.<sup>3</sup>

Fran went on to add that she not only had "no relationship" with her body, but no relationship with her "femininity" also, again suggesting that an estrangement from identity, in this case with respect to her identity as a woman, may be central to Fran's sense of dividedness arising from shame. Fran continued:

And I'd go to church and they'd say, "You know, you're very useful here; you do things here." And then I

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<sup>2</sup>Fran's apparent readiness to attribute her "segmented" state to her own activity of organizing identity may be a faint echo of an emphasis on individual responsibility. A similar hint was given by Charlene, in suggesting that her demands were self-imposed. There may be an implication for counseling in a case like this, in terms of being alert to a tendency toward over-responsibility.

<sup>3</sup>Fran would appear to describe what psychotherapists have termed 'dissociation,' where severe emotional trauma causes people to dissociate themselves from the 'person' (or part of themselves) experiencing the trauma. In the case of sexual abuse for Fran, dissociation understandably involved her body. The sad result of Fran's segmentation was that at times, her self-estrangement felt desperate to her. She described once feeling like she had:

...seen this picture of myself being smashed in pieces. Who I am, my identity was in several chunks of broken pottery, and all the slivers had been blown away. There was no way my life could ever have any cohesion or fullness.



would go home, and I would be a nothing. In fact when I started counseling, I said, "*I am a nothing.*" And that was just a couple, a couple, three years ago. "I am nothing." That's what went through my mind when I was abused, "I am a nothing. Who I am is nothing."

Fran's repeated words "I am nothing" suggested a tragic loss of selfhood rendered by her abuse. Moreover, Fran's words may also serve as a measure of the depths a shame-based sense of inadequacy can plunge. In this instance, Fran's words would appear to indicate not just lost identity, but annihilated identity.

Charlene also spoke of separation from identity. Recall from Chapter Four that Charlene's preventive strategy against chronic shame was to select certain "hats" of identity for public presentation. The context for Charlene's comments about hat-flipping was as follows:

Something I've gone through in the past couple of years, that -- it almost cost us our marriage -- but it was a similar type of thing, of being in a catch-22 situation, and it was an identity crisis. And I didn't know who I was. I didn't know who I wanted to be. I didn't know who *Malcolm* wanted me to be, and I just kept flipping hats constantly through the day, for whatever seemed to suit the moment, but none of it was really how I was feeling, or who I really was.

Charlene's reference to not knowing who she, nor Malcolm, wanted her to be appeared to suggest that identity for Charlene had two masters (herself and Malcolm). However, when she went on to reveal that the reason she was flipping hats was "to please whoever was around [her], for fear of them not being able to accept [her] for who [she] really was," Charlene indicated that identity may have had countless masters. In making the link between lost identity and the array of people whom identity must serve, Charlene would appear to point to her strategy against shame ("flipping hats") as the cause of her separation from identity. Regardless, the existential peril for Charlene, like Fran, appeared to an inaccessible, or lost, identity, resulting from shame and strategies against it.

Fran and Charlene's apparent estrangement from their identities was not unlike that described by Barbara. Recall our mention in Chapter Four that Barbara had felt obliged to project an identity of being "holy" as a preventive strategy against shame. Barbara went on to explain:

[In relation to trying to be "holy"] So I always felt inadequate of myself for not being able to like everybody, not being able to have everybody like me, that type of thing. I'm finally realizing, but I think it's probably because of my lack of sense of self that knows who I am and what I am and, you know, what makes me me.

Barbara's conclusion that she did not know "what makes me me" would appear to be an expression of an identity which she felt was lost. While Fran's, Charlene's and Barbara's experiences are by no means to be equated, the unifying thread appears to be a sense of separation from identity, resulting from shame and preventive strategies against it.

Not only did interviewees appear to experience self-estrangement in terms of lost identity, but also in terms of estrangement from feelings and desires. In elaborating ways that she felt she still did not know who she was, Charlene explained:

But my history is that I'm always looking for what's going to make life better. What's going to make me happy. Is it opening my own business? Is it staying at home? Is it playing golf really well? Is it doing needlework really well? Is it being a super cook? Is it teaching school? Is it being the A-number one volunteer at church? It's a constant seeking.

Charlene's "constant seeking" for what will make her "happy" implied self-estrangement in the realm of her desires. Fran spoke to this subject more directly:

The big issue for me is I'd not known anything about my heart's desires, because I don't even know my heart. I hadn't a clue. People would say, "What do you want to do?" Any normal, any healthy person may have had a

desire -- a million desires! -- about what they'd want to do in life. I couldn't even tell them one.

Fran cited the "hard shell" around her heart, i.e., her strategy of protecting against shame's pain, for her estrangement from her desires. Moreover, she also revealed that it was not only estrangement from desires, but from her entire emotional life, that were at issue for her. Following her parents' death, Fran took an extended trip to Germany to sort through her life. She remembered the trip this way:

I cried for four weeks straight. I was in a German Language Institute. And I could be sitting in the middle of class and down would come the tears. It was a sense where my heart -- all the walls of my heart were finally feeling something for the first time ever. The only way I had feelings before was possibly sex or some other chemical means of having feelings because they didn't exist in any other form. They were physical feelings; there were no emotional feelings about anything, nothing.... Do you remember the song -- I don't know how old you are -- but in high school, this song "I am a rock. I am an island, and a rock feels no pain; an island never cries." That was my theme song in high school.

In likening herself to a "rock [which] feels no pain," Fran appeared to make another allusion to the "hard shell" of emotional protecting which apparently had been a preventive strategy against shame she had employed for so long (see p. 142). However, as she began "finally feeling something for the first time ever" (a statement of the apparent depth of her sense of estrangement), one emotion from which she was estranged, in particular, captured her attention:

And then I began to ask a very different question in my life, and that started in the Fall of 1990.... What does it mean to love God, and I just couldn't get answers on that.... I knew that I knew nothing about love. I knew that I had never experienced it, deeply. I had good friends, but I didn't know the first thing about love. (I: You didn't know the first thing about giving love or receiving love?) Receiving it, or feeling it, or even letting it sit there for a while and thinking about it. I couldn't look in the mirror for the same reasons.

Fran's seemed to demonstrate her complete alienation from love in two ways. First, she appeared to point to her alienation from love's comprehensive relational scope (i.e., God, friends and self). Second, she appeared to point to her alienation from love's variety of expressions (estrangement from "receiving it, or feeling it, or even letting it sit there for a while and thinking about it").

To recap the preceding discussion, we have suggested that among the consequences of interviewees' shame and preventive strategies against shame was self-estrangement. Self-estrangement appeared to be experienced as lost identity and estranged feelings and desires. Before moving on, it may prove illuminating to contrast self-estrangement issues which may be peculiar to chronic shame, with those characteristic of chronic guilt.

"Pam" was a woman in her early fifties, married, with two teenage children. Throughout the interview, Pam provided increasing evidence that she suffered on a chronic basis from guilt. Early in the interview, when I asked her about her sense of sin, Pam expressed the following:

I do remember, and I continue to feel to this day, being taught (in church, as a youth) everyone is given gifts, and you are responsible for being a good steward for your gifts, so a strong sense of responsibility to behave -- to go to the soup kitchen, to be helpful to the best of your ability. I would say selfishness, doing things for my own pleasure, for my own gain, that's what I would see as sin.

The remainder of the interview, and indeed of Pam's life seemed to have conformed to this pattern of avoiding activities for her own pleasure, as a preventive strategy against guilt.<sup>4</sup> An example of an incident apparently for

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<sup>4</sup>As discussed in Chapter Two, activities can trigger shame or guilt. The issue concerns where the experience locates in the person experiencing the emotion. When the locus of the experience concerns the action, then the predominant emotion is guilt; when the locus of the emotion is identity, then the feeling is shame.

which Pam did feel she had been selfish came when she and her husband "Ralph" decided to purchase a Mercedes automobile. Pam related the story this way:

I guess the most absolutely selfish thing that I have ever done, my husband and I have just done, and it kind of is a reflection of a mid-life crisis or something. We have three brown fake-wood station wagons, two Fords and a small Chrysler, all of which have over a 100,000 miles on them, and we have just bought a red Mercedes convertible. (*p laughs almost giddily*).... but anyway, it's a reasonable expense at this point in our life.... We are keeping up with our church pledge. We have still got a huge commitment to the church beyond our pledge, so in relationship to the money we spend on other, on good causes, right causes, you know, responsible causes, this is nominal. (*laughs gently*)

Recall that Helen Lewis cites rationalization as a telltale sign of guilt (while denial signals shame). Recall also that rationalizations are characterized by a person justifying his/her actions (while denial means a disowning or disavowal of one's involvement in an event). In the above quote, Pam's reference, for example, to having had "three brown fake-wood station wagons.... all of which have over a 100,000 miles on them," would appear to be an effort to justify the purchase of the Mercedes by virtue of her past frugality with automobile purchases. Additionally, her reference to still having "a huge commitment to the church" would also appear to be a rationalization of the purchase. This is not to say that Pam did not at times experience shame for selfishness also. However, Pam's rationalizations would appear to suggest that given shame or guilt in the re-telling of this story to me, her predominant experience, in the above example, was guilt (These contours of experience appeared to be repeated in other examples in the interview also).

Returning to the particular issue at hand, of comparing experiences of self-estrangement, elsewhere in the interview Pam reported she was considering a change in vocation. At the time of the interview, Pam volunteered on



the local school board and at a soup kitchen. When she discussed with me her thoughts about what she might alternatively pursue, Pam explained:

I'm torn between becoming super soup-kitchen volunteer, or going to work in a travel agency, or going to work in a -- I love gems and jewelry -- getting a gemologist degree and working in a jewelry store, becoming a docent at the art museum; that is something that I've always said, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a docent at the art museum." (I: What's a docent?) A person who, first learns all about a collection and then leads tours and teaches other people about it.... I would give my right arm for her experience (*laughs*). I love that, just love, love, love art, and I would love to -- That's *that's selfish*, okay? I can't quite....

In contrast to Fran, who could not name one single desire of her heart, and Charlene, who could not decide where to find significance and happiness, Pam demonstrated a conspicuous grasp on her desires. However, Pam's focus on selfishness appeared to single out at least one of the significant reasons why she has never become a docent. Pam went on to explain:

(I: Just to do something you really want to do is selfish?) Yes! Yes! Ohhhh! To be able to be in a situation to learn all about these wonderful art works, to take classes free at the University in art, to go on trips to the University of Chicago Art Museum, or the Metropolitan, to have tours of it, and to just fill your being with these wonderful colors and forms and, and learn about the art and the culture that it came from and the people it came from, ooooooh! Wow!! But I haven't allowed myself.... The helping is more obvious if I go to the soup kitchen than if I go to museums.

Pam has not committed a transgression causing her guilt (or shame), but some contours of guilt nevertheless seem to emerge. For example, Pam's mention that "[she hasn't] allowed [herself]" the luxury of being a docent may be evidence of Lewis' contention that with guilt, the stimulus is voluntary (see p. 80). That is, it is Fran's voluntary choice to do or not to do that which would cause her guilt (in this case, choosing to become a docent). Contrast this example to that of Jean, whose feelings of shame resulted



from the president's failure to stop and talk to her at the social gathering, a stimulus which would appear to be involuntary for Jean.

Returning to the issue of estrangement, in contrast to Fran and Charlene's estrangement from knowledge of their desires, Pam's estrangement appeared to be from permission to act on her desires (about which she is well aware). Also given that self-knowledge reflects identity and permission reflects agency, then this example would appear to demonstrate differing forms of self-estrangement with respect to guilt and shame.

To sum up, the discussion thus far in this first section of Chapter Five attempts to describe and analyze several interviewees' experiences with self-estrangement as consequences of their shame, and preventive strategies against shame. Next, we turn to strategies that interviewees employed in an attempt to achieve self-reconciliation.

## **B. Strategies For Reconciliation**

Having described and analyzed interviewees' experiences of self-estrangement, we turn now to their strategies for reconciliation with their lost identities, and their feelings and desires. About strategies for reconciliation, Fran had this to say:

But this is what I'm saying. Jesus says "I have come to bind up the broken-hearted." The problem with shame is that... if you look at Adam and Eve, the change that took place in Adam and Eve is that they understood the new nature of reality.... Their hearts were broken. They had pure hearts, but their hearts were broken. They were divided. See, I look at it as broken-hearted, and I say divided.

By referring to her self-estrangement by means of biblical

language of being "broken-hearted" rather than "divided," Fran may have felt she could draw near to Jesus, whom she believed said he came to "bind up the broken-hearted." This word also signaled a preference Fran appeared to have elsewhere in the interview for theological (often biblical) words. Fran continued:

Right, right. That's very much a part of that, I think. And you know, when we become Christians, God really begins to make us whole. So I look at this thing about binding up the broken-hearted, the part that is divided -- the part that is crushed and divided -- the internal man that is crushed and divided, and Christ has come to bind them up.

Fran's reference to the words of Jesus ("I have come to bind up the broken-hearted"), and the personal nature of her language when she expresses that God "makes us whole" (*italics mine*), hint at change in Fran's life regarding shame which may have involved a new experience of God (not just new cognitive insight). It must be said that Fran's brutal honesty in describing past experiences with God as ones which "hurt like hell" lends credibility to her description of her new experiences with God as ones bringing healing. However, given that a characteristic defense of shame is denial, one might well expect a chronic shame sufferer to see painful portions of relationships only in hindsight, once denial has been pierced.

Given that in Chapter Four Fran had described "human authorities," who had contributed to her image of God as punitive (see pp. 152-154), one wonders if new human authorities have contributed to her experience of God as Healer and Reconciler. Notably, Fran's own pastoral counselor was a minister from her conservative Reformed tradition (although not the minister of Fringes Church). Fran had this to say about this counselor:

Sometimes I just don't have in my life people who push me beyond what I can see, and I need that very much, and [her counselor] can, because he knows God in a

different way than I know God, and his own experience with God has been deep and powerful, so he reads Scripture and interprets Scripture and uses Scripture.... He has input into my life that almost no one else can have.

Fran's mention that her counselor was someone whose "experience with God has been deep and powerful" would seem to indicate that she at least admired her counselor's spirituality. Moreover, that her counselor's input into her life was like "no one else can have" suggests that her encounter with this new human authority may indeed have been part of the healing process.

Fran's mention of "Scripture" three times here calls to mind her use of right theological knowledge as a preventive strategy against shame (see pp. 162-163). In fact, Fran had said this identity was one on which she "based [her] life." Fran would go on to pick up this theme in another place. Again, returning to the theme of her estrangement from love, Fran explained:

It was the hardest thing in the world to understand that God loved. It was yeeeeeears. It was yeeeeeears [until I began to understand].... Truth and meaning had importance to me, but I wasn't asking questions of love of the text of Scripture. I was asking about truth. Why is this true. I was feeding my mind. My mind has been my massive defensive mechanism.

In the context of realizing that Fran's mind has been a "massive defense mechanism" in her life against shame, including in relation to Scripture, one wonders just how Scripture may be functioning in her life in the counseling process. Given Fran's history, it is hard to imagine Scripture is not functioning to some degree as a defense against shame during counseling.

However, given Fran's frequent mentions of Scripture in the context of her comments about her growth and healing (such as the above reference to Jesus as the one who came to "bind up the broken-hearted"), the Bible may well be

serving as a valuable resource as well. Although Fran does not describe specifically how the Scriptures function in her healing, Matt provides one indication of how the Bible specifically functioned in his life:

As you walk with the Lord, you sense what is real guilt and what is false guilt, and I suppose that's through the study of God's Word, you know, what is right and what is wrong, and then also as God deals with you individually, there are certain Scriptures that will come out to you as if He's speaking to you! when you read them (*chuckles*), you know He speaks through His Word.

Matt's view that God speaks to him through God's word does not mean that Fran shares the same view. However, given their common church community, Matt's comments may suggest how the Scriptures are viewed by some people at Fringes Presbyterian Church. We will return to issues regarding the use of the Bible in chronic shame in Chapter Six.

In addition to Fran's mention of Scripture, her comments about her counselor pushing her beyond what she can "see," suggest that new cognitive insights may have played a part in her healing process. Fran provided more into the nature of this insight when she reflected on the content of one of the sermons she heard her counselor preach (at his church) on Psalm 103:

David's building his life on the compassionate father, the image of God as a compassionate father, and it's explicated in the life of Jesus. Our sin stirs the pity of God. He knows us at our worst. And then, God as our compassionate father, he treats us better than our sins deserve. And that's what [the counselor] really spent a lot of time on in that one sermon, because he talked about, he's not like man. He's patient in our rebellion. He's patient with our sins...he's sparing; he's so sparing in his anger and wrath.... We have this rage and the malice of our own hearts, where the abused becomes the abuser. All of that energy is energy for sinful patterns, and it's just unrepentant rage being let loose." He said, "But God is not like that. God is not like man. He tempers his justice in the body of his son." All of that should have been vented on me, and he talked a lot

about what it means to have our life redeemed from the pit.

Fran appears to have focused on two messages in this sermon. One message was sin, evident in her references to "sin... rebellion... evil... anger and wrath...(and) sinful patterns." Recalling Fran's one-time sentiment about identity that "I am nothing" one suspects there may be congruence between Fran's references to sin (possibly even the Reformed notion of total depravity) and her shame-based identity.

Another message Fran appeared to take from the sermon concerned the nature of God. Glimpses of the God she mentioned in the above dialogue were a God who is a "compassionate father" ("explicated in the life of Jesus") who is "sparing," "patient with our sins" and "not like man." The Reformed tradition has long understood God's grace in terms of humankind's depravity. Calvin wrote that "to honour the goodness of God it is chiefly necessary to remember how much we are indebted to Him...."<sup>5</sup>

Fran did appear to have a certain amount of gratitude toward God. For example, she had this to say about her reconciliation to true identity:

But Lord help the person who has to unravel a life that's built like that, you know. It's only God that can provide the needs for the unraveling. I'm also thankful to God; I've seen more and more of his mercy and his kindness towards me because he has chosen so carefully *what* to reveal at whatever time it has been, and it has not been all at once.

Fran's "thankful(ness)" to God as a result of seeing "more of his mercy and kindness" would appear to be an expression of gratitude. Fran's own theological path to God's grace, therefore, would appear to include an appreciation for sin.

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<sup>5</sup>John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), trans. with introduction by J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke & Co. Limited, 1961), pp. 57-58.

However, as already mentioned, there is reason to suspect that notions of total depravity may be deeply congruent with someone based in shame. We will return to this question again in relation to Fran's story later in this chapter (and in Chapter Six).

While Fran appeared to find reconciliation as a result of insights from Scripture, possibly mediated through her counselor, Barbara took a different path toward reconciliation. Recall from the previous part of this chapter that Barbara mentioned separation from what makes "me me" in relation to her struggle to be "holy" all the time. Moreover, Barbara suggested an additional consequence of shame and her preventive strategy of being "holy:"

...it's just, you know, so that I ended up like always being kind of, you know (*chuckling*), metaphorically get punched left and right. And then all these aggressions from others I would just take it and then, you know, I would, you know, if I'm supposed to be a good Christian I'm supposed to take all this and still love these people, you know *that* type of thing.... So then I felt that -- it's almost like a, you know, a door mat.

In likening herself to a "door mat," Barbara appeared to express an experience of an altered identity (in addition to an identity from which she was separated). Moreover, the particular nature of that altered identity appeared to be similar to that of Matt.

Recall from Chapter Four that Matt's preventive strategy against shame was to try to project an identity of "committedness" and "total obedience" to God (which, incidentally, Matt appeared to believe was his true identity). However, when "barbs" of shame came, signaling his preventive strategy to have failed, Matt responded as follows:

I believe that it is only by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can basically absorb those barbs. You just absorb it, love that person, and



realize that the person needs our love more than they do a retort.

Matt's image of "barbs" of shame would appear to be very much like Barbara's picture of getting "punched left and right." Moreover, Matt's image of "absorb(ing)" barbs may parallel Barbara's image of the "doormat." That is, it would seem that whether one is a doormat, or one absorbs barbs, either way, one accepts punishment without lashing back.<sup>6</sup>

Yet their attitudes toward their plights appeared to be different. First, consider Matt. Returning to the above-quoted text, Matt's suggestion that "You just absorb it, love that person..." suggested he was quite willing to live with the barbs. Moreover, his reasoning that you "realize that the person needs our love more than they do a retort" suggested he may have seen absorbing barbs to be a demonstration of his Christian "commitment."

One can only wonder if Matt's response might be an echo of traditions of Christian asceticism and self-denial. Self-denial has deep roots in the church, as evidenced in early church martyrs and in the ascetic traditions through the centuries. John Calvin devoted a chapter of his *Institutes* to self-denial, in the context of a section on the way we receive the grace of Christ. In it, he wrote, "Let us reiterate in fuller form the chief part of self-denial....

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<sup>6</sup>In truth Matt did not absorb the barb from the usher. That is, even though he did not lash back at the usher with a rebuke, Matt carried strong feelings about the event for months or years later. Therefore, Matt may be deluding himself. Matt's wife's response puts Matt's own response in perspective. Matt recounts:

So about halfway home from church I said to Kathy, "Did you catch what that fellow said to us today?" She laughed. She said, "Yeah! Wasn't that funny!"

If absorbing the barb meant not allowing the barb to get the best of him, then Matt's wife would appear to have been the one to absorb the barb.

Scripture calls us to resign ourselves and all our possessions to the Lord's will, and to yield to him the desires of our hearts to be tamed and subjugated." Calvin continued, "We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds.... Conversely, we are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions."<sup>7</sup>

Arguably, self-denial as a practice of piety has retained some of its influence in modern-day Reformed churches, particularly in conservative branches. One might be tempted to look toward Matt's church setting to explain his willingness to absorb barbs especially given societal trends which may mitigate against Matt's practice. That is, some have argued that the United States today remains in a self-fulfillment movement, one apparently counter to practices of absorbing shame's pain.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Matt's apparent willing acceptance of the barbs, note Barbara's response:

But then I just always felt like, "Boy, I just can't do that." So I always felt inadequate of myself for not being able to like everybody, not being able to have everybody like me, that type of thing.....(I: Where does the shame come in?) Well shame came in because, you know, I can't be holy. The reality is, not everybody's gonna like me, not, and I'm definitely not going to be happy when I am, you know, encompassing all the aggressions from others, do you know what I mean?

Barbara's expression that "not everybody's going to like me" suggested a reliance on practical cognitive insight as a helpful part of her strategy toward reconciliation to an identity which took "reality" into account. Apart from the

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<sup>7</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1960), III, vii, 8, 1.

<sup>8</sup>See Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching For Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Random House, 1981).

pressure she felt to be "holy," Barbara's words, including her image of a "door mat," appeared unreligious. Apparently, with comparatively less religious stake in her preventive strategy, Barbara seemed ready and able to relinquish her failing strategy (and identity). In fact, Barbara was making changes in her life on this order:

And now I'm beginning (*chuckling*) to be a little bit more nasty, you know, so like, if somebody starts being, you know, a little bit, trying to make me the victim of their aggression, and I'm kind of trying to learn to express, "Wait a minute, I'm not the person you can drop everything on me," you know what I mean?... My good side has just kind of -- was developed to the, like, highest level, where my dark side is just completely suppressed.

Barbara's mention of her "dark side," along with her references to "victim" and "aggression" may have hinted at the impact of the self-help or counseling movement on her life. Regardless, Barbara gives no indication other than for us to imagine that she found 'permission' to relinquish her identity from outside of the church walls. Barbara's apparent ease in doing this may have been an indication of the waning moral authority that her church had in her life.

Barbara's and Matt's varying reactions to somewhat similar experiences would appear to be informed by Helen Lynd's theory of the self-revelatory potential of shame. Lynd has written that "...fully faced, shame may become not primarily something to be covered, but a positive experience of revelation [of self]."<sup>9</sup> Barbara's shame revealed her "dark side" to her, the side which could not manage to be "holy" and yet amounted to her as an encounter with her fuller, true self. One wonders if Matt's failure to allow shame to reveal to him that he will inevitably fail from time to time in his Christian "commitment" was a missed opportunity to see his frailty and know his need for

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<sup>9</sup>Helen Merrell Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1958), pp. 18-20, 166-167.

redemption apart from his efforts at piety. The result may have been a relaxing of stringent demands in his life and step closer to an experience of Christian grace.

To sum up, Fran, Charlene and Barbara suggested that they suffered from lost identity in connection with chronic shame, including estrangement from their emotions and desires. Moreover, as a result of her preventive strategy against shame, Barbara also appeared to experience herself as a "doormat" -- a type of altered identity which did not appear all too unlike Matt's description of himself as someone who "absorbed" barbs of shame.

Interviewees' responses to their self-estrangement were varied. While Fran achieved some self-reconciliation mediated by a new-found compassionate God who gradually revealed to her portions of identity to be integrated, Barbara described some success prompted by her largely cognitive revelation that she simply could not manage to be "holy" all the time. By contrast, Matt chose to willingly accept his lot of absorbing barbs of shame, apparently because of the positive stake in Christian "commitment" which this identity brought.

Interviewees' efforts to be reconciled to identity may also have implications for current discussions on identity among social theorists. It has been widely held that with the break-down in community structures in America and the West, that people have lost firm reference points for identity. Anthony Giddens, for example, has pointed to abstract systems as the predominate modern reference point for identity. For Giddens, every time one gets cash from a bank, or sends a letter, for example, one implicitly recognizes the large areas of (abstract) coordinated actions and events that make social life possible. The problem for Giddens, however, is that in order to develop a firm sense of self rooted in one's community, one needs

social structures in which one can trust, and abstract systems provide no such sources of trust.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically as this issue of community break-down relates to churches, Robert Wuthnow has raised the question of the degree to which churches will remain vital communities able to confer the identity of "Christian" on its members in the future. Wuthnow notes that in past centuries the state could confer the identity of "Christian" on citizens. However, with the growth in religious pluralism this role of the state has ceased. Moreover, Wuthnow concludes that the rise of voluntarism, individualism, utilitarianism, and the social circumstances reinforcing these trends, will greatly diminish the church's ability to sustain community in the future.<sup>11</sup>

The experiences of interviewees would appear to suggest difficulties within Fringes Presbyterian Church in conferring identity of "Christian" for its members. Charlene, for example, is divided between varying identities from society and her church regarding women. What has meant being a "Christian" for a woman in Charlene's church is being successfully challenged by forces outside of her church, and Charlene appears to feel the strain. Barbara appears to have already jettisoned some of the basic character that formerly meant a "good Christian" to her in her church ("holiness"). Matt appears to have gone in the opposite direction, holding to his clear, yet brittle, Christian identity of being "committed." Perhaps Fran is coping best of all, apparently refashioning her Christian identity based on emerging new experiences of God and his love. All four of

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<sup>10</sup>Anthony Giddens, *The Consequence of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, in assoc. with Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 112-114.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 32-45.

these people come from a single congregation of less than 250 people. Moreover, these people are in a conservative congregation where social strength is believed to be stronger than its liberal counterpart. Nevertheless identities are under assault in these churches, suggesting that Wuthnow's concern is a real one.

### C. Self-Estrangement and Sin

Having considered interviewees' experiences of self-estrangement as a consequence of shame and preventive strategies against shame, we now turn to theological reflection on self-estrangement as sin.

For people from conservative Reformed traditions, some of whom appear to view their lives in explicitly theological terms, reflecting on the self-estranging consequences of preventive strategies against shame as sin may provide a resource for reconciliation. That is, considering their certain views of identity as sin may provide a theological reason to turn from these identities.

While discussing the process of maintaining a certain view of identity, Fran had this to say:

He [i.e., a pastoral theologian who has influenced Fran's thinking] calls it a dysfunctional idol, and that means that you organize your entire life around this thing, and it's actually destroying you.... In other words, they cause you to have to weigh every minute of your day, every decision you make, everything you put on your -- these things, whatever they are, they are the foundational aspect of how you make decisions.

Fran's return to language of "organize around" appeared to link this comment with earlier language of projecting a single "ray" of identity ("You're always having to... organize that around people not finding out...."). Moreover, Fran's labeling of these identities in this



instance as "dysfunctional idols" appeared to point to the way these identities were "destroying" her because of the control they exerted over her life.

Fran explained elsewhere that the pastoral theologian from whom she had heard the term "dysfunctional idol" was a Reformed Christian. Regardless, idolatry as a notion of sin has Reformed roots. Reformed theologian John Leith lists a "polemic against idolatry" as one of nine points defining the ethos of the Reformed tradition. Leith writes: "The Reformed polemic against idolatry prevents human endeavors from overreaching themselves, claiming too much for themselves, and thus destroying themselves."<sup>12</sup> We can not know whether Fran's view that her dysfunctional idols were "destroying" her was informed by theological definitions like that supplied by Leith. However, because Fran mentioned later that the pastoral theologian from whom she borrowed the term "dysfunctional idols" was also a Reformed Christian, it is possible that Fran's notion of the destructive power of idols may have come from her tradition.

Yet, the destructive nature of dysfunctional idols was not all of the apparent meaning of idols for Fran. She continued:

[The dysfunctional idol] doesn't build up the true identity that God has for us. I think it creates an identity that's a false identity in ourselves -- who we are -- to worship that kind of an idol.

Fran's reference to "false" and "true" identity may be instances of psychoanalytic language which she appeared to use freely alongside theological terms. Furthermore, "false identity" appeared to point to a specific way "dysfunctional idols" were destructive, namely that they

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<sup>12</sup>John H. Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1977 and 1981), p. 75.

were self-estranging.<sup>13</sup> Fran went on to reveal where thoughts on "dysfunctional idols" ultimately led her:

Whatever that idol is, whatever is causing that pride, whatever it is defending against -- it's the very thing that's holding my life together at the moment, or that I perceive is holding my life together at the moment. God says, "Go ahead and let this go."

It may be that re-naming the single "ray" of identity as a "dysfunctional idol" was appealing to Fran because it captured for her the self-estranging and destructive nature of this process. However, it may also be that it provided her a theological target substantial enough to warrant God's words to her to "let this go." One wonders if God could enter the picture as forcefully for Fran if God were only to be telling her to let go of a "false identity."

There was some reason to believe that Fran's introduction of sin into the picture had been successful in helping her be reconciled to estranged portions of identity:

There is so much more of an inclusion of who I am as a Christian, as I see Jesus more and more forgive me, I can say, "Oh that part is me too." Whereas in shame before, I would say, "That's not me" or I'd choose not to identify that part of my identity with who I am. Does that make sense at all? Okay. So with a Jesus, a bigger Jesus, so to speak, as the Cross gets larger and larger in my life, I can say, "Oh, yes, and that's me too, by the way," you know.

Fran did not offer examples of specific wrongs, for which she sought to have Jesus "forgive [her]." Moreover, we discussed in Chapter Three interviewees' self-perception of being "wrong" in shame, a sense of culpability which often

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<sup>13</sup>To the question "What is idolatry?" the Heidelberg Catechism provides this answer: "It is to imagine or possess something in which to put one's trust in place of or beside the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word." Fran would appear to point to an issue of trust when she references her potential "worship" of her dysfunctional idols. The Heidelberg Catechism in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 4.095.

did not appear warranted. Therefore, there is some reason to suspect that the sin for which Fran seeks Jesus' forgiveness is created in part by a self-perception of inadequacy resulting from her shame-based personality core.

Nevertheless, the "bigger Jesus" and the "Cross [which] gets larger" in her life appears to have been a real means for reconciliation to parts of herself previously denied. One suspects that especially for people that may have had their sense of sin enlarged in chronic shame, that their appreciation for the atoning work of Jesus for that sin may at times be correspondingly increased.

Returning to our main concern of the extent to which understanding self-estrangement as sin may serve as a resource for reconciliation, "estrangement" itself is a theological conception of sin with deep historical roots, particularly in relation to covenant theology and to conservative Christianity. Donald Bloesch writes, "Sin, in evangelical perspective, is not so much the infringement of a moral code as the breaking of a covenantal relationship."<sup>14</sup>

The covenantal relationship to which Bloesch refers likely is rooted in biblical covenants between God and humankind. Biblical theologian Walther Eichrodt has argued that Old Testament sin is, at its core, estrangement from God. Eichrodt explains that the point of all social and moral laws in the Old Testament was not to focus on external performance of the Law, but rather to test whether or not the Israelites demonstrated a moral will united with God. Eichrodt writes,

....it is hardly necessary to prove that the prophets, for all that they associate themselves with the moral

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<sup>14</sup>*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Basingstoke, Hants: Marshall Pickering, Marshall Morgan & Scott Pub. Ltd., 1985; first publ. by Baker Book House, U.S.A., 1984), s.v. "Sin" by Donald Bloesch.

judgment of their time by their concrete stress on particular sinful actions, yet always return to the personal spiritual attitude from which transgressions of law and morality arise. The conception of the divine-human relationship as something laying claim to the very depths of the whole human personality here makes itself felt by causing sin to be portrayed as at bottom a wanton jeopardization, nay, dissolution of this relationship.<sup>15</sup>

Eichrodt goes on to conclude about sin: "by...defining the concept of guilt in terms of the disturbance, or indeed complete destruction of an absolutely personal divine-human relationship" one succeeds in capturing the concept of sin in "all of its existential seriousness."<sup>16</sup>

The implicit, rather than explicit, biblical evidence on which Eichrodt relied was what led Tillich to conclude that estrangement is not a biblical term. Nevertheless Tillich found the implicit evidence weighty. In addition to that provided by Eichrodt, Tillich points to the symbols of the expulsion from paradise, in the hostility between humankind and nature, brother against brother and nation against nation as evidence for estrangement in the Bible.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, evidence from the New Testament includes Jesus' poignant words on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). At this decisive moment in human history, Jesus' embodiment of sin on the cross was expressed in words of estrangement from the Father.

Not only has estrangement been a notion for sin in evangelical theology, but also in Reformed theology. Again, the context is covenant theology. Just after the time of the Reformers, covenant theology was central in Reformed thinking, especially under the influence of John Coccejus. Toward the beginning of a fifty page footnote

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<sup>15</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1961), II, p. 375.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 376.

<sup>17</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (London: The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1957), II, 45.

addressing Coccejus and covenant theology, Karl Barth wrote, "In the older Reformed Church there was a theology in which the concept of covenant played so decisive a role that it came to be known as the Federal theology."<sup>18</sup> Barth goes on to describe original sin according to Coccejus, this way:

Consciously and voluntarily, and with God's permission, Adam does that which is forbidden. In so doing, he and all his descendants forfeit their friendship with God, their divine likeness and the status of promise, falling under the divine curse and judgment.<sup>19</sup>

Barth's description suggests that Coccejus may have seen estrangement in multiple dimensions, i.e., not only with respect to God (broken friendship), but with respect to self also (forfeiting the divine likeness). Regardless, others have since made the case, notably Tillich who saw a deep common center to estrangement.

Whether or not notions of sin as estrangement, found within and beyond the reaches of Reformed theology, will be of help to Fran, Charlene, Barbara and Matt in achieving reconciliation is difficult to know. Teachings from the tradition may be useful in alerting chronic shame sufferers to the consequences of preventive strategies against shame, not only in relationship with self, but also with God and other people. Moreover, as Fran found with the notion of idolatry, there may be some force in theological language and concepts of sin for people in conservative Reformed communities, which helps them, when the time is right, turn from maintaining only these certain views.

## II. Emotional Distress

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<sup>18</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part One. eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, printed in 1956), IV, 54.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, 59.

In the preceding discussion, we considered interviewees' experiences of self-estrangement as a consequence of their preventive strategies against shame, and of their shame itself.

In this second section of Chapter Five, we turn to interviewees' experiences of anxiety as a consequence of unsuccessful efforts to maintain certain views of identity and to protect against pain. Strauss and Corbin write that the consequences of action/interaction may become a cause for another instance of the phenomenon under study.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, when interviewees' preventive strategies failed, they appeared to experience more shame, resulting in an additional preventive strategy, namely, withdrawal.

#### **A. Anxiety**

Recall from Chapter Four that Fran described organizing her life around a single ray of identity, which she sought to project to people. However, Fran also described an emotional price she paid for this activity. She explained:

In order to [organize her identity around a single ray of light], it causes pain and stress, and when it gets pushed to its extremes it's just panic; it's just ultimate panic. And I can think of times in my life when it caused a real -- I can't recall that word -- freneticness. (I: Like you were losing control, like you were going to explode.) No, just a freneticness of trying to continue to hold on to an identity, to hold onto a certain image.

Fran's "freneticness" in trying to "hold on to an identity" may be an example of what Wurmser called "shame anxiety," which he said was captured in the sentiment, "I am afraid that exposure is imminent and hence terrible

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<sup>20</sup>Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 106.



humiliation."<sup>21</sup> That Fran may have felt exposure was imminent was suggested in her reference to "trying" to hold on to an identity. In fact, Fran shared some instances when her efforts to hold on to her identity failed:

And too, I remember some very powerful moments in voice lessons, where I would do things that were really incredible, and I'd realize in that split second, 'Oh my gosh! That's myself!' and I would burst into tears, and I couldn't finish my lesson; I'd just have to leave. It was horrible. It was horrible!... There was such anxiety because the external self was intact, until the internal identity met it, and then it was horrible, just horrible!

Fran's focus on exposure, and on identity issues, suggested that her "horrible" feeling may be shame. Ironically, Fran's anxiety resulted from the discovery of a positive portion of identity (an "incredible" singing voice). Not only that, the next example Fran shared also concerned the discovery of an apparent positive portion of her identity:

And I remember, for instance, I don't know if I told you last time, reading Ephesians for the first time. I *could not* read Ephesians. It was too much. It was too much reality. If God has said that he has created me before the foundations of the earth, that was too much. I simply shut the book. I could not believe that about myself. Enough to say I didn't read it again for another year. It took a year to transpire before I even read it again. And I think that's some experience of guilt and shame, identity issues as related to guilt and shame, particularly shame.

As with the unexpected discovery of an "incredible" singing voice, one might have expected Fran to have welcomed a message of feeling special in God's eyes. Yet such instances appeared to provoke "horrible" feelings and denial.<sup>22</sup>

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21Wurmser contrasted "shame anxiety" to "shame affect" ("I have been exposed and humiliated, I want to disappear as this being") and "shame as preventive attitude" ("I must always hide and dissemble, in order not to be exposed and disgraced"). Leon Wurmser, "Shame: The Veiled Companion of Narcissism," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, Donald Nathanson (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1987), p. 68.

22Fran's experiences may reflect a severe form of what

The explanation for this reaction may lie in the nature of the "external self," mentioned in the above example of the singing voice. It may be that for Fran, the "external self" was the incredible singing voice which other people could hear. By contrast, it would seem that the "internal identity" may have been captured in such comments elsewhere that she was "nothing... [and] unworthy of love."

Lynd has suggested that the most painful experience of shame is exposure before one's own eyes.<sup>23</sup> Fran's apparent shame prompted by a positive experience of herself (the fine singing voice) would appear to be an unlikely cause of shame; however, it may be that once shame has shaped core identity for a person, then challenges to that identity are painful, even when they are positive.

If the above understanding of Fran's experience is correct, then it may have implications for her selection of a Presbyterian Church. Given that Fran found it a "horrible" feeling to be confronted inside with a positive picture of identity, then one can see why she might find her way to a church setting where her own inner understanding of identity was congruent with the church's theology of humankind.

That is, Reformed churches have long been known for their doctrine of "total depravity." However, total depravity should not be understood in isolation; rather, it was an integral part of Calvin's theology of grace. Calvin wrote that "to honour the goodness of God it is chiefly necessary

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happens for some people who find it difficult to accept a compliment. Following the same line of thought as produced by Fran's example, people who do not see themselves worthy of praise may feel only pain in receiving a compliment; therefore, they reject or deflect it.

<sup>23</sup>Lynd pp. 32-34.

to remember how much we are indebted to Him...."<sup>24</sup> In other words, without understanding humankind's depraved state, one cannot apprehend the goodness and grace of God. Nevertheless, the doctrine itself can appear quite bleak. The Westminster Confession, the confessional statement of Fran's church, describes humankind's fallen nature this way, "we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil...."<sup>25</sup>

Keith also described an instance where efforts to hold onto a "right" view of identity resulted in a consequence of anxiety. Again, we return with Keith to his boyhood experiences in Korea. You may recall from Keith's testimony in Chapter Three that top academic standing was highly valued in Korean culture. Keith had explained, "the top two or three [universities], they are worshipped. The rest of them, shame."

This incident in Keith's life came from a time during his secondary school training when he was at the top of his class academically going into the last day of exams. Keith explained:

My teacher came to me and told me, "Keith, you are top right now. Please go on. One day left." There was anxiety... this kind of huge amount of anxiety emerged from my heart. I totally was lost. I could feel it. I wanted to cry. I do not know why I want to cry, because it was a kind of big pressure. I do not want to have that kind of attention, I think. I do not want to have that kind of attention.... and it was very lonely. I did not want to study anymore, so I just -- a panic attack. I thought I was going crazy.

Keith's "anxiety" and "panic attack" may have been akin to

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<sup>24</sup>Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552), pp. 57-58.

<sup>25</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 6.034.

Fran's "horrible" feelings of "anxiety." The picture became clearer when Keith revealed the reason for his anxiety:

And then the reason is not only math, chemistry, physics, English, things like that. We also had to take exams, physical training, and art. I was not good at art.

Unlike Fran, who had actually been confronted with an alien view of identity (i.e., an "incredible" singing voice, and her value in God's eyes), it would seem that Keith simply anticipated an unwanted view of identity (a failure in art). Yet, Keith's "anxiety" suggests that even the anticipation of that "wrong" identity may bring shame. Again, the answer may lie in the pain of real exposure before one's own eyes, even if exposure before the eyes of others has not yet (or may never) occur.

While Charlene felt shame "anxiety" when she was confronted with a positive view of identity, Keith felt "anxiety" and "panic" in anticipation of being confronted with a negative view of identity.

Finally, Keith's reference to "big pressure" may represent another consequence of trying to hold onto a certain view of identity as a strategy against shame. That his pressure arose in anticipation of being exposed as a failure in art suggested that a consequence of holding onto a certain "right" view of identity is internal pressure and strain.

Keith went on to say this about "pressure":

(I: Since you've come to America, and you've gotten a little physical, geographical distance from home, has it helped at all, or do you still feel a lot of pressure?) A lot of pressure... Physical distance does not solve anything. I'm totally bounded up. It doesn't matter.

Keith's language of being "bounded up" was similar to that used by Fran at one point:

To me, with shame is the question of: We are so bound because of our shame -- and as I said before, you know, I can have a dark night of the soul every other month. I didn't know that there was such a thing as living in freedom.

While Fran claims to be experiencing more "freedom" now, her admission that she "didn't know that there was such a thing as freedom" along with Keith's language of being "totally bound up" suggest that the pressure to maintain the right view of identity can be constant for someone suffering from chronic shame. Moreover, Fran's focus on freedom helps set one of the goals of breaking away from chronic shame and its strategies.

#### **B. Withdrawing From View (and the cycle continues...)**

In the previous discussion we saw how anxiety as a consequence of chronic shame gave way to shame itself. Predictably, more preventive strategies against that shame ensued, including one we did not discuss in Chapter Four, namely, withdrawing from view. While this strategy could have been discussed with other preventive strategies in Chapter Four, placing it here highlights the cycles which appear to characterize chronic shame. That is, when preventive strategies fail, they become causes of shame, which result in shame phenomena, resulting in more preventive strategies, which also can fail, resulting in more shame.....(and so the cycle continues). Moreover, interviewees' testimony suggested some reason to believe that withdrawal was employed when maintaining the "right" view of identity failed. With these thoughts in mind, we return to our narrative.

When Fran was confronted in the book of Ephesians with an identity of value in God's eyes, she managed to avoid that

identity for one year, presumably until she was able to accept it. Keith described a different approach. Returning to Keith's account of his anxiety over failing to finish first in his class, I asked Keith if he did finally finish first:

No, third. (*Keith laughs*) And then from that time, I didn't want to study so hard. There is kind of meaninglessness in me.... Before, I was very enthusiastic in sports -- soccer team. I was in front line, center forward.... Comparing with [American] football, I was always in the offensive position. But after that, I want to become a 'keeper.' (I: After what?) After that kind of experience. I do not want to play offense. I just want keeper. (I: Why do you think that happened?) Because, it's very good. I don't have to, running, or something like that. I just there, and they shoot. I was happy. It was so good... I don't have to compete.

For Keith, his response to his shame anxiety was like that of moving from an offensive position to "keeper" on a football field. Keith's analogy appeared to point to a strategy of withdrawal from competition. Apparently for Keith, if he is not competing to be the top student academically, then he risks no shame for failing to achieve it.

Quite possibly withdrawal is another instance of protecting, which was described in Chapter Four. Nevertheless, Keith's description of this strategy as a result of shame anxiety from failing to hold onto a certain identity (top academic standing) shows a possible progression between strategies. First, Keith attempted to hold on to identity of top standing. It appeared to be when that identity was no longer possible, that Keith then resorted to withdrawal.

However, it was not just failure to hold onto an identity of top student which apparently caused Keith to resort to this strategy. It may be that the "meaninglessness" Keith mentioned above, also played a part. Keith mentioned a



friend who had had influenced his attitudes toward achievement in school:

He [i.e., Keith's friend] was reading those kinds of books, Nietzsche, Camus, and he asked me, "Why do you read? Why do you study?" I didn't know why I studied. Why are we studying? What for? And then he gave me one book. It was about what is life. The title is "What is Life?" I read. It was very nihilistic. What is life? Then we should die.

Apparently, Keith resonated with the kind of philosophy that he found in the writings of Nietzsche and Camus, for he concluded:

We are brainwashed, because if you do not have money, if you do not have power, if you do not have intelligence, you are nothing.

It should be said that the consequence of Keith's shame anxiety over the prospects of losing his public identity as top student did not appear to be one of complete withdrawal. In fact, Keith was pursuing a Ph.D. degree at the time of our interview. However, his withdrawal strategy was still evident. For example, Keith commented on his professors' reaction to a recent paper he had written:

[The professors] say, Wow! This is a very good article. Publish it! Publish it! But I think, "No." The anxiety was, "Can I write this kind of paper next?" The answer was, "No." (I: No matter how much people encourage you, it doesn't seem--) --Temporary. Temporarily I feel good, and then if there comes another project, there comes anxiety. "What shall I do!?"

As was the case when he carried top academic standing into the final days of high school exams, apparently Keith's fear that he could not *maintain* his writing to publishable standards caused him to withdraw from competition.

Keith was not the only chronic shame sufferer among interviewees to appear to resort to this strategy. Jean

described her relationship with her parents and siblings this way:

As soon as I could go away to college, I went far away to college (*laughing*)... and that was my rebellion, to go far away, and I have not been home since. I mean I have been home to visit, but I have not lived at home, been in California again. But when I am there, I comply. I don't get into it. And when I'm on the phone, I don't get into it. And there are sometimes, things... once in a while, I'll knock off and say something, but generally, I just don't get into it. (I: Because what do you fear will happen if you get into it?) I suppose rejection. I think that's probably what it is.

It may be that Jean's going "far away" to college and never returning except for visits was a response motivated by similar reasons as Keith's withdrawing from academic competition. Like Keith, Jean had apparently begun with a strategy of trying to maintain a certain view of identity in her family's eyes. Recall Jean's comments about her relationship with her family:

I could never do anything appropriate or good or right or whatever, for my parents either as I was growing up... constantly. And now -- my father is dead -- my mother is sort of like whatever I do is still not right.

Jean's references to not being able to do anything "right" in her parents' eyes implies that, in her mind, she had tried to maintain whatever right identities she knew to try. Because she still fears "rejection" from them, it may be that her physical withdrawal to the other side of the United States was a preventive strategy against chronic shame.

Not only that, even when she speaks to her family over the phone, she says she chooses to "comply" and not "get into it." Again, Jean may be describing another form of withdrawal, in this case emotional withdrawal from family



similar strategy of withdrawal from family relationships, Charlene described what might be the same strategy, in its extreme form. Charlene explained:

So I guess more what I have felt is shame. It doesn't change it; I still felt it! It's still there. I don't know what to do about it, so I just plod through each day, and hope and pray that it'll go away. What else can you do? Punch your ticket and check out? (I: Well...) That's not the answer, because I thought about that very seriously, many times... I thought about killing myself many times... (I: What was driving you to that?) Escapism. Escapism. You don't know how many times... (I: But what was it that you were you escaping from?) Too much -- I had too much on my agenda -- there was too much I was responsible for, and I wasn't able to do it all.

Charlene's impetus for "escapism" through suicide, like that of Keith and Jean, appeared to be an alternative to holding on to a certain right identity. Given that Charlene had earlier described demands she believed were required of her to excel in business and homemaking (see pp. 100-102), Charlene's "agenda" may be another reference to the demands of womanhood she felt from norms in both church and society. Indeed, suicide would be a form of withdrawal, namely an extinguishing of identity. Such an extreme form of withdrawal may be what Fran also meant when she described a two-year period of her life when she said she "was suicidal, every minute of the day."

One can only speculate as to the cost of withdrawal to interviewees. For Keith, withdrawal most recently meant he lost an opportunity to publish a paper his academic mentors thought was top quality. For Jean, geographic and emotional withdrawal from her parents would appear to result in a missed opportunity to share her life with them.

In this second section of Chapter Five we have considered anxiety as a consequence of preventive strategies against chronic shame. Additionally, we looked at interviewees' attempts to withdraw from view as a further preventive

strategy against shame. We next turn to concluding comments for the chapter.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we sought to describe and analyze the consequences of chronic shame and strategies against it. Two primary consequences described by interviewees were self-estrangement and anxiety.

First, self-estrangement appeared to manifest itself as lost identity and as estranged feelings and desires. To the extent self-estrangement was a consequence of interviewees' preventive strategies against shame (described in Chapter Four), self-estrangement would appear to suggest these strategies to be *unhelpful*. We also considered ways interviewees sought to be reconciled to lost identities, including their use of resources from their conservative Reformed tradition, such as Scripture and a discovery of a loving and compassionate God.

Second, anxiety appeared to manifest itself as a consequence of failing to maintain certain views of identity. Because anxiety often contained, or gave way to shame affect, anxiety would appear to suggest instances when interviewees' preventive strategies against shame were *ineffective*. Moreover, in response to resulting shame, interviewees described an additional preventive strategy against shame, namely withdrawing from view.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, understanding these largely negative consequences of interviewees' preventive strategies may help chronic shame sufferers begin to substitute effective strategies for the ineffective ones. Moreover, as a potential pastoral help in this regard, we reflected on self-estrangement in the context of Reformed understandings of estrangement and sin.

In Chapter Four we considered preventive strategies against shame, and in Chapter Five we considered the consequences of those strategies and of shame itself. Now in Chapter Six we will turn to a discussion of how the findings in Chapters Three to Five inform a pastoral response to chronic shame.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Pastoral Theological Practice with Chronic Shame

In Chapters Three, Four and Five, we described and analyzed interviewees' experiences of chronic shame, in church (and larger societal) context. The description and analysis in those chapters was aimed at providing a narrative of Reformed churchpeoples' experiences with chronic shame. These experiences were analyzed with respect to how social and psychic structures appeared to interact in creating chronic shame.

In this chapter we turn to how the findings can be used to advance and develop pastoral-theological responses to chronic shame. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, we will consider ways the findings inform and reform not only existing pastoral theological models, but broader church practice. In the second section, given that existing pastoral theological models for shame do not include models for pastoral counseling, we will consider a counseling model for chronic shame.

#### **I. Reconsidering Pastoral Care and the Church**

We begin by examining ways that the findings inform existing models of pastoral care and the church. Regarding pastoral care, the findings fell into two primary realms. First, the findings provide a schema of causes, strategies and consequences of chronic shame, and some of the relationships between these phenomena, within which existing models can be located. Second, they reveal ways that interviewees' church and theological contexts, in

addition to apparent psychic structures, appeared to create chronic shame. Additionally, regarding the church, we will explore the implications of the findings on motives for conservative Reformed piety.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, at the same time that this research sought to consider counseling issues related to chronic shame in the wider context of the church, the horizon has been narrowed to the Protestant Reformed setting. However, it is hoped that pastoral theologians from other Christian traditions will be able to adapt issues raised here to their own theological and ecclesial settings.

#### **A. Reconsidering Existing Models of Care and Counseling**

As discussed in Chapter One, a debate central to both secular psychotherapeutic and pastoral theological responses to chronic shame has been the extent to which overturning chronic shame is a process which is socially related. To review, Heinz Kohut has conceived of therapy in terms of a type of self-surgery, where the only person apart from the counselee integrally involved in the process is the therapist; moreover, the therapist is involved only to the extent that (s)he provides an external source for selfobject transferences, reactivating the archaic process of self formation. Pastoral theologian Donald Capps, under

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Selby is among pastoral theologians to argue that a person's public world and private world are intimately connected. Therefore, a compassionate response in a given situation can equally consist in addressing personal needs of individuals or public issues related to social and political structures. In similar fashion, this thesis seeks to address chronic shame issues not only at the private level of models of counseling and care, but the public level of corporate church practice.

Peter Selby, *Liberating God: Private Care and Public Struggle*, New Library of Pastoral Care series, gen. ed. Derek Blows (London: SPCK, 1983), p. 5.

the influence of Kohutian theory, has similarly built his model for healing shame on "self-care," where social context plays only a secondary role.

By contrast, Gerhen Kaufman has focused his model for "restoring the interpersonal bridge" on returning to the interpersonal sources of internalized shame, found not only in parental relationships, but in wider social contexts as well. For Kaufman, the quality of "identifications" one has made with parents, significant other people, and situations has not only played a material role in forming chronic shame, but holds the promise for healing shame. In a somewhat similar vein, pastoral theologian Lewis Smedes points to relationships with family and friends for not only the sources of chronic shame in peoples' lives, but also for sources of grace.

While insights from Kohut's approach, especially with respect to the therapeutic value of empathy, remain central to chronic shame counseling, the findings from this research would suggest that there are a variety of factors from church and larger societal settings which serve to shape chronic shame. Understanding not only what these factors are, but specific ways in which they may interact with psychological structures serves as a primary way this research can serve to inform existing models of pastoral care. Because this research aims to advance pastoral theological models for use with churchpeople, then a social context of particular interest is that of the church.

We now turn to two existing pastoral theological models, and one secular model, to explore ways the empirical findings can inform these models. As a way to orient our discussion of these approaches, we will reconsider each model through the experiences of a single interviewee.

## 1. Self-Acceptance (Smedes)

Lewis Smedes calls people who suffer from repeated shame to seek "spiritual experiences" of "accepting grace." These experiences are found in everyday interaction with other people, including friends and family members. For Smedes, such experiences lead to self-acceptance, a crucial ingredient in discharging shame and in experiencing the "lightness of grace."<sup>2</sup>

We will use the case of Charlene (whom you may recall in relation to differing church and societal expectations as a woman) to reconsider Smedes' approach. First, regarding the larger scheme of chronic shame, the findings would suggest that issues of acceptance would appear to relate to shame's causes, in particular the extent to which failure meant rejection in a parishioner's life. Moreover, these causes may be confused both by distortion and uncertainty, leaving the parishioner with both fears and feelings of shame.

As one might expect, Charlene signaled problems with self-acceptance by speaking of rejection. However, language of rejection came in a variety of forms. For Charlene language of rejection included both "hurt" experienced in relation to her husband, and "anger" experienced in relation to a friend. She experienced rejection in the form of inattention from other people, and by means of ambiguous messages communicated by her mother. Again, rejection was also clouded by uncertainty, leading to ongoing feelings and fears of shame. Charlene spoke of matters of self-acceptance only once, when she revealed her strategy of getting "second opinions" about whether or not she was "okay."

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<sup>2</sup>Lewis Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), pp. 125-158.

Regarding her church and societal contexts, Charlene's issues of self-acceptance related significantly to her various roles as a woman. As a woman in a conservative Reformed church, where traditional values are upheld, Charlene sought to fulfill traditional roles concerning the home and motherhood. However, as a woman in late twentieth century America, Charlene also has responded to new opportunities for women in the marketplace. When this array of demands were apparently invested with ideals of perfection, Charlene seemed to be frequently left feeling like a failure and like she had been rejected.

Therefore, in seeking out "spiritual experiences" of "accepting grace," as recommended by Smedes, a pastoral caregiver might want to begin by focusing his/her diagnostic attention on relationships and experiences which present particular risks of rejection. For example, in Charlene's life, these relationships include her husband, best friend and mother. Moreover, rejection often related to demands Charlene felt as a woman and often came packaged not in clear words of rejection, but in uncertain indications of indifference and inattention, and of "anger." Attending sensitively and wisely to these relational areas may assist a pastoral counselor in leading Charlene to "spiritual experiences" of "self-acceptance." Moreover, for this parishioner from a conservative Reformed setting, Charlene may find some help in reflecting on the 'works acceptability' scheme provided in Chapter Three. That is, she may find some help in realizing that a scheme where failure means rejection is one fundamentally at odds with the picture of grace and redemption offered by God, and offered in the predominant view of covenant in her Reformed church tradition.

The preceding discussion would appear to show some of the complexities involved in considering interviewees' issues of self-acceptance (many of which do not appear to be

Smedes' intention to address). As a final note, Smedes urges shame sufferers to learn to forgive the primary person who instilled shame in them while growing up, even if this forgiveness must consist in "silent forgiveness" (internal resolution) only. For Charlene, this person appeared to be her mother, before whom Charlene feels, "I still never have measured up in her eyes...." Because her mother is still living and still treats her this way, forgiveness may be complicated by continued management of the ongoing relationship. Again, these are among the issues for which a pastoral counselor may be of help.

We will continue to be concerned about issues of acceptance as we turn to a discussion of encounters with grace in the second half of this chapter.

## **2. Self-Trust (Capps)**

As mentioned above, Donald Capps has modeled his response to shame somewhat along the lines of theory offered by Heinz Kohut. Capps has suggested that in response to shame-based problematics of the self which characterize this age, we return to "self-care as a moral imperative." In particular, Capps calls for self-trust. He draws upon Scripture in narrative fashion, seeking to show, for example, how the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume engaged in a clear act of self-trust in her extravagant act.

While self-trust often is practiced individually, Capps goes on to suggest that in its best form, self-trust is mutually exchanged. Such was the case in this same woman's exchange with Jesus, who affirmed her actions, demonstrating his own self-trust. For Capps, such interactions are examples of "positive mirroring," which engenders love, the root hunger of the shame-based depleted



self, and ultimately helps shame sufferers discover their true selves.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the empirical findings can help contextualize self-trust issues both in the wider picture of chronic shame and in the church. In considering these findings, we turn to the experiences of Fran (whom you may remember had experienced sexual abuse). Regarding the wider context of shame, trust issues for Fran appeared to come in relation to her preventive strategies against shame, namely her ongoing strategy of "protecting" against painful shame and in maintaining a certain view of identity. Fran mentioned the word "trust" only a few times, although trust-related issues appeared to be signalled in her activities of social "gyrations" and of "justifying and rectifying" identity to other people. Moreover, when Fran did speak of trust, it was not explicitly about issues in *self-trust*, but rather trusting God.

Turning now to locating Fran's issues of self-trust in church context, painful shame may be emanating from a source invested with religious meaning, such as Fran's desire to avoid "slothfulness." Exploring Fran's understanding of "slothfulness," may give her the opportunity to reassess the functioning of this religious meaning in her life. It may be that examining offsetting biblical and theological concepts, such as Sabbath rest, may help Fran gain a more critical and balanced view of slothfulness in her life, soothing some of the pain she formerly felt for being slothful, and possibly leading to an increased ability to trust.

Moreover, at one time in her life, Fran had difficulty trusting God, whom she saw as punitive. Fran linked this

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<sup>3</sup>Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 162-169.

punitive view of God to past "human authorities," who had inflicted painful shame on her. Fran's suggestion that her barriers to trust had been created in relation to "human authorities" in her life would seem to question Capps' lack of emphasis on chronic shame sufferers as social people, in relation to issues of trust. That is, issues of trust with chronic shame may be significantly related not only to trusting oneself, but trusting other people and God as well. Moreover, Fran's suggestion that she had overcome some barriers to trust, at least with God, through God's "own revelation to [her], personally, in [her] heart" would appear to critique Capps' neglect of chronic shame sufferers as religious people also.

Therefore, in urging chronic shame sufferers to attend to issues of self-trust, as Capps recommends, the pastoral caregiver may want to focus his/her diagnostic attention on preventive strategies against shame. Attending to interviewees' words and images signaling protecting and maintaining certain views of identity would appear to be the path to discovering the nature of issues of self-trust. However, it would appear unwise to isolate issues of self-trust with chronic shame; rather, issues of trusting other people and God would appear to be integrally related as well.

We will again take up issues of trust with chronic shame in the context of the Christian counseling model found in the section two of this chapter.

### **3. Restoring the Interpersonal Bridge (Kaufman)**

The previous two counseling models were devised by pastoral theologians. We will now return to psychoanalyst Gershen Kaufman's work to consider ways that the findings impact his model, since Kaufman's model lends itself to counseling

in social context and may provide insights useful for a pastoral theological response.

As mentioned above, Gershen Kaufman's model for psychotherapy with chronic shame focuses on restoring the "interpersonal bridge." Because his model assumes that chronic shame was internalized earlier in one's life by means of psychic and emotional "identifications" formed especially with parents but also with other people in one's social settings, Kaufman bases his therapeutic approach on returning to the interpersonal origins of shame. In returning to the interpersonal origins, counselee and therapist, relying on insight and on emotional healing, can embark on "reparenting" and "identity regrowth" in an effort to heal chronic shame.<sup>4</sup>

Kaufman may underestimate the impact of current factors in a person's social setting for sustaining chronic shame. Moreover, his model does not consider the place of a transcendent God in the regrowth process, or in the desired conception of reformed identity. Nor does he specifically consider issues of theology and the church in his identifications which must be considered. However, his therapeutic technique would appear to offer some help in a pastoral counseling context. In re-considering Kaufman's model, we turn to the experiences of Matt (whom you may remember in connection with the usher's comment when he was late to church, and Matt's "commitment" to Christian piety).

In considering how the regrowth of identity might occur, the findings from this research may prove useful in considering first, where identity issues may be coming into play in the overall picture of chronic shame. In Matt's case, his identity appeared to be invested in appearing

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<sup>4</sup>Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1985 and 1980), pp. 119-131, 146-152.

"committed" in his Christian piety as a preventive strategy against shame. One example in which this committedness appeared to show forth was in his attachment to prayer. Moreover, because Matt's response to "barbs" of shame was to "absorb" them (apparently as part of his Christian commitment) Matt's shame and shame strategies seemed to create in him something of a martyr identity. While Kaufman's model aims to return to historical roots of identity formation, a present-day gauge on identity, including how it is functioning in relation to chronic shame, would appear to be important insight for counseling.

As for returning to the interpersonal origins of shame and examining formative identifications, there were at least two indications that many of Matt's identifications may have been made in a church setting. Recall the vignette from his childhood that Matt recounted, in which each week he did something like fight with his brother, whereupon he would feel the need to be "saved again" that Sunday in church. Also, recall that Matt traced shame he felt for the church usher's comment to signs in a previous church ("I'm early" and "I'm late"). Given that the process of restoring the interpersonal bridge begins with the trust established between client and therapist especially around issues of (parental) approval, in Matt's case the counselor may want to begin by focusing on issues of trust regarding Matt's Christian "commitment." For Matt, "reparenting" as Kaufman puts it, may be a matter of 'repastoring,' not to alienate Matt from his tradition, but to help him reconsider the ways his piety (and shame) have formed his identity, and possible ways that identity can be reformed centrally around images of grace.

We turn now from a consideration of existing counseling models to a consideration of the implications of the findings for conservative Reformed piety.

## B. Reconsidering Conservative Reformed Piety

The findings in this research would appear to relate not only to how conservative Reformed contexts shaped chronic shame, but how chronic shame affected conservative Reformed churches. One implication of these findings concerns motives for Christian piety.

In *Reformed Spirituality*, Howard Rice writes that Reformed piety is the pattern by which we shape our lives before God "in grateful obedience to what God has done for us." Rice claims to take his view of piety from John Calvin, who wrote, "I call 'piety' that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces." Therefore, for Rice, Reformed piety was motivated by gratefulness to God. To Calvin, acts of piety appeared to be even expressions of love to God.<sup>5</sup>

Rice goes on to suggest how piety may have sometimes gone wrong in Reformed life. He writes, "We grant, however, that all too frequently piety has been an expression of self-righteous negativity and grim determination." For Rice, this has often been the result of a "stern and legal conception of God" which people all too often hold. By contrast, Rice points to the Westminster Shorter Catechism which calls Christians not only to "Glorify God" but to "enjoy him forever."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Howard Rice, *Reformed Spirituality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 46. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I, ii, 1.

Like Rice, Brian Gerrish interprets Calvin to affirm the Christian's response to God's grace to be centrally one of gratitude.

See B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

<sup>6</sup>Howard Rice, *Reformed Spirituality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 47. The Shorter Catechism in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*:

While Rice's cursory overview does not attempt to speak to the variations in Reformed piety, both in history and in current expression, he nonetheless points to the issue of motives behind piety, which is our present concern. Recall that several interviewees described or demonstrated using piety as preventive strategies against shame. Fran was one such interviewee. Recall that Fran described at one point in her life having "nothing else to base [her] life on," but her theological "knowledge." When an inadequacy in this knowledge was exposed, such as in a discussion with her friend Jason, then shame resulted. Also, recall that Matt sought to present himself as totally "committed" as a Christian. If he was accused of being less than "committed" then "barbs" of shame ensued. Among Matt's expressions of "commitment" were Christian prayer, and a public image of purity of character.

Human motives may never be pure. However, to the extent that interviewees' piety was motivated by fear of shame, then shame would appear to be a barrier to the gratefulness suggested by Rice. Moreover, when shame is chronic, fear of shame may constitute an absorbing motive for interviewees, at times leaving little room for love as a motive for piety. For example, Fran's descriptions of "always having to justify and rectify every single situation that comes into [her] life" (*italics mine*) presented a picture of consuming effort.

The main point to be made is that underlying dynamics of shame and shame prevention may be a way that conservative Reformed piety is robbed of its virtue in its current practice. It may be forces like this at work that led Ben Campbell Johnson, in his survey of varieties of Christian piety, to warn that the danger of evangelical piety is that



sometimes the form of piety can remain after the life of the Spirit has gone out of it.<sup>7</sup> These findings concerning possible motives behind Christian piety may have implications for preaching and teaching in conservative Reformed churches on the subject of piety.

However, the relationship between chronic shame and motives for piety can be a resource for pastoral help, both to the counselor and the counselee. For someone like Matt, who believes that purity of character is a worthy goal, helping him see and evaluate motives driving that quest may be a way to give him 'permission' to re-evaluate those goals, or find a different path to reach them. Regardless of the motive for doing so, this would appear to be an important step in overturning shame. It may have been a re-evaluation along these lines that caused Fran to conclude about some of her "right" identities as preventive strategies against shame, "It doesn't build up the true identity that God has for us." Similarly, such a re-evaluation may have contributed to Barbara's conclusion about the pressure to "be holy all the time" that "Boy, I just can't do that." For both of them, acting upon these realizations would appear to have been positive steps toward releasing the grip of chronic shame on their lives.

Therefore, the empirical findings would appear to have implications for reconsidering motives behind Christian piety, both with an aim toward reforming practices of piety and as a resource for overturning chronic shame.

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<sup>7</sup>Ben Campbell Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality: A Focus for Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), p. 69.

## II. Toward a Christian Counseling Model for Chronic Shame

In the previous section, we examined ways the empirical findings inform existing counseling models and the church. Next, we turn to ways the findings can be used to build a Christian counseling model for chronic shame.

Neither Lewis Smedes' model of self-acceptance or Donald Capps' model of self-trust is a pastoral counseling model for chronic shame. Both are offered as self-help resources for pastors and laypeople. Therefore, in an attempt to develop counseling practice with respect to chronic shame, it would seem appropriate to consider the empirical findings within the context of a counseling tradition.

The remainder of this chapter may best be classified as a consideration of issues in chronic shame counseling, emerging from the empirical findings. These issues relate to various resources in counseling, such as Scripture and prayer. They also relate to interviewees' views of sin and of God and their ability to trust God. Also, we consider varying degrees of success interviewees found in employing these resources as strategies for discharging shame. These findings lend themselves to a two part approach.

First, within the context of an overall aim of encounters with grace, we will consider uses of Scripture and prayer in chronic shame counseling, along with dealing with barriers to trusting God. Second, under the heading of voices of truth, we will consider ways a counselor may serve as a check on reality for counselees, including as it relates to issues of sin.

An important question to be addressed early on is why *Christian* counseling? S. B. Narramore writes that

(1) any therapist who is a Christian, (2) any therapist who conceptualizes the counseling process in terms of Christian concepts and values, or (3) a therapist who actively incorporates biblical principles and concepts into the therapeutic process.<sup>8</sup>

The counseling model considered here will be patterned generally after Narramore's third category, for two reasons. First, a Christian counseling model of this type would appear to be compatible with the conservative Reformed tradition from which five of the seven interviewees suffering from chronic shame came, suggesting a relevant response from a research standpoint.

Second, exploring a Christian counseling model offers the opportunity to return to an original impetus for this research. In the "Background to the Research" section in Chapter One, I stated that my own psychotherapy for chronic shame, though helpful, had seemed theologically lacking to me. Upon reflection, I sense that the issue was words. Having come from a conservative Reformed background, entering a counseling setting which did not explicitly mention God or the Bible caused the counseling session to seem as if God was not there. Again, I believe that this is because in my own conservative Reformed tradition, I have known God mainly through the words of Scripture. Therefore, the analysis supplied in Chapters Three - Five provides an opportunity to return to the original research impetus, yet with critical distance supplied through the experience of interviewees.

Narramore goes on to describe his third category of Christian counselors this way:

The third group of therapists goes beyond conceptualizing the therapeutic process in Christian terms to actively verbalizing the patients' struggles

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<sup>8</sup>Hunter, Rodney J., gen. ed. *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, assoc. eds. H. Newton Malony, Liston Mills and John Patton (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1990), s.v. "Christian Psychotherapist," by S. B. Narramore, pp. 151-152.

The third group of therapists goes beyond conceptualizing the therapeutic process in Christian terms to actively verbalizing the patients' struggles in Christian (or biblical) terms.... This group of therapists includes a diverse collection of individuals ranging from very directive and didactic therapists to those who utilize an insight-oriented depth therapy. Their commonality is found not in their therapeutic orientation or style but in their incorporation of biblical principles and concepts in their therapeutic endeavors.<sup>9</sup>

While there may be factors other than the Bible which tend to unite Christian counselors of the third type (prayer would seem to be one), Narramore would appear right that the Bible is the main one.

David Lyall writes that Christian counseling represents a broad field of practice. At one end of the spectrum, Lyall cites counselors such as Selwyn Hughes and Larry Crabb, who draw from insights of secular psychology when they do not appear to contradict biblical truth. At the other end of the spectrum are counselors such as Jay Adams, whose 'nouthetic' counseling model sees the root of all counseling issues to be sin. For Lyall, one of the possible abuses in Christian counseling, especially with models like that of Adams, is the danger that solutions can be too directive or arise out of the inner needs of the counselor (rather than the counselee).<sup>10</sup>

Lyall's caution would appear to be warranted with respect to chronic shame counseling, given, for example, that Scripture and sin, two areas in which counselors have sometimes been given to directive approaches, appeared to be integrally involved in dynamics of chronic shame. However, within a church tradition where counselees often

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<sup>9</sup>Narramore, p. 152.

<sup>10</sup>David Lyall, *Counselling in the Pastoral and Spiritual Context*, Counselling in Context series, eds. Moira Walker and Michael Jacobs (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1995), pp. 39-41.

experience God through the Bible, failing to draw responsibly from the resources of Scripture would appear to be equally unhelpful.

Before proceeding, this may be an appropriate place to further discuss a point mentioned several times already thus far, namely that evangelicals often come to know God through the Bible. Paul Holmer argues that evangelicals often make the Bible the object of their devotion, rather than the God to whom the Bible points. Holmer disagrees with evangelicals on epistemic grounds, arguing that God "is not really described there [i.e., in the Bible]; he shows through!" Holmer admits that the alternative path to knowing God is less clear, and he warns against a pure philosophical theism; however, what he seems clearest about is that the evangelical approach results in a striving for an objective, rational picture of God to which no human being has access.<sup>11</sup>

Holmer's failure to consider Jesus Christ as a visible likeness of the invisible God would seem to be an important omission in his position that God is not described in the Bible. Moreover, his contention that the Bible tells us more about the Christian life, than about God, would appear to be a difficult position to support.<sup>12</sup> However, Holmer justly points to the seriousness with which evangelicals view the Bible, and his critique would appear to be a helpful reminder to evangelicals that God is not *contained* within the words of Scripture, but rather is an independent being to which the Scriptures point. These and other considerations will be kept in mind when later in this chapter we address the use of the Scriptures in chronic shame counseling in the Christian counseling tradition.

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Holmer, "Contemporary Evangelical Faith," *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, eds. David Wells and John Woodbridge (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 74-75, 82-94.

<sup>12</sup>Holmer, pp. 94-95.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two parts, encounters with grace and voices of truth. As in section one of this chapter, each discussion begins with the empirical findings, aiming to see how these findings elucidate issues which bear upon a Christian counseling model for chronic shame.

#### **A. Encounters With Grace**

One of the primary findings of this research is to observe the way norms from interviewees' church settings served as demands, often of perfection, giving rise to frequent failure, and chronic shame. Not only did these demands appear to create failures resulting in shame, but they consequently appeared to inform "right" identities that interviewees sought to maintain as preventive strategies against shame.

This research also found that interviewees sometimes felt shame as a result of perceptions of rejection. Moreover, there was some reason to believe that failure *meant* rejection for some interviewees. We reflected theologically on this relationship for interviewees between failure and rejection in the context of a scheme of a covenant of works. The covenant of works, represented in the biblical picture of the Mosaic covenant, was thought to be a temporary administration of God's Covenant of Grace, not an example of a way God ultimately related to his people in history, as understood in Reformed theology.

Based on the above findings, a primary aim of Christian counseling with chronic shame will be to provide a counseling environment where counselees experience fewer demands than they do in church and society. Within this counseling context, counselees may find a safe environment



within which to begin letting go of identities which they seek to maintain to prevent shame, but which only lead to self-estrangement, anxiety and withdrawal.

In addition to this negative aim, however, the positive aim is to provide counseling environments in which counselees may encounter the grace of God Jesus Christ. Grace has often been understood as the unconditional acceptance of God, represented in God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. Thomas Oden has used Karl Barth's discussion of analogy to argue that human attempts at acceptance can only be partial representations of the acceptance of God. Oden presents Barth's argument that any analogy between the divine life and interpersonal human processes is always only a *partial correspondence*. What Barth seeks to avoid, writes Oden, is on the one hand, a parity, or simple synonymy, between our language and God's being, and on the other hand, a radical disparity between God and human language. Rather, Barth defines analogy as a limited or partial similarity of differing things.<sup>13</sup>

Oden goes on to argue that when applied to psychotherapy, analogies often operate in the improper order. Psychotherapy is littered with natural analogies, where a secular process, such as interpersonal relations in psychotherapy, is examined, and then its theological significance is reflected upon. Oden goes on to write,

Without totally denying the validity of all these efforts, we intend to show that the analogy can and must be read the other way, deriving psychotherapeutic learnings from theological learnings, reading the process of human self-disclosure from the vantage point of the divine self-disclosure, thinking through the therapeutic process from the perspective of its being

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas Oden, *Kerygma and Counseling: Toward a Covenant Ontology for Secular Psychotherapy*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 122-123. Drawing from Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, printed in 1956), II/1, pp. 225, 235, 274.

illuminated by the empathetic love of God in Jesus Christ as the ontological basis for secular healing.<sup>14</sup>

Oden's theory would appear to suggest, therefore, that acceptance in counseling is based on a deeper reality of redemption in Jesus Christ, preceding the counseling event in history, and to which counseling always points. While Oden is less detailed about the application of his theory than he is of the theory itself, it would nevertheless appear to be a useful theoretical foundation on which to build our focus on encounters with grace for chronic shame counseling.

Moreover, pointing beyond the counselor to a deeper reality of acceptance in Christ would appear to be an important element in achieving *transformation*, thought to be an important focus for lasting change in chronic shame counseling. That is, because shame is understood to be an experience of the self, change is believed to come through transformation of that self (not reparative actions, which would be the case for guilt).<sup>15</sup> However, because counselors can not impart transformation, like they might impart insight, for example, counselors might best see themselves as providing environments where people might encounter God, who brings transformation.

These encounters may be mediated, however, through the counselor and a variety of resources brought into the counseling sessions. We next turn to a consideration of how this counseling aim of providing interviewees environments for encounters with grace might be worked out in counseling with respect to a variety of issues emerging

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<sup>14</sup>Oden, pp. 124-125.

<sup>15</sup>Transformation is change of form. However, depending on the goal for the new form, transformation can be either a positive or a negative experience. Therefore, transformation in this thesis includes the indispensable element, also present in Reformed theology, of being made new according to the grace of God through Jesus Christ. In particular the new being is one which knows acceptance by grace.

in interviewees' stories. Namely we turn next to consider the use of the Bible and counseling dialogue, along with barriers to trusting God, in chronic shame counseling.

### **1. Using the Bible**

Recall from Chapter Four that Fran shared that "right" theological knowledge, gained chiefly from the Bible, was a picture of herself she sought to portray to other people as a preventive strategy against shame (see pp. 162-164). Fran shared that when caught in what she perceived to be a lack of theological knowledge, such as in a discussion with her friend Jason, that "the shame was intense," reminding us also of the potential for exaggeration in interviewees' failures. Moreover, Fran's three mentions of the "Scripture" in relating what she had found helpful in her current counseling at least raised the question of whether or not during counseling also, biblical knowledge was functioning as a demand threatening shame (see pp. 188-189).

However, Fran also testified that biblical passages such as Jesus' words that "I have come to bind up the broken-hearted" appeared to have played a vital role in reconciliation and healing for her also (see p. 187). Moreover, as Bloesch and Marsden point out, conservative church communities are characterized by a primacy on the Bible, and Fran's repeated references to the Bible also may mean that her understanding of God has come primarily through the Scriptures. If this is so, then it may be that experiences of grace for Fran may also be found in reading and hearing the Scriptures. Regardless, the Bible is likely to be an important resource in counseling.

Several suggestions may help a Christian counselor cope with this range of considerations. First, counselors will want to observe, early on in counseling, how counselees

appear to employ the Bible in their lives. Counselors may want to be alert both to signs that biblical knowledge serves as a demand in counselees' lives, and to signs that encounters with God mediated through biblical words may serve as a source of transformation.

Second, open communication between counselors and counselees about the way the Bible functions in counselees' lives may be useful, particularly if counseling proceeds more than several sessions. Again, in a Christian counseling context, such discussions would probably need to be carried out in the context of counselors' own clear expressions of commitment to Scriptural primacy; otherwise, counselors' probing may be misinterpreted by counselees as an attempt to undermine Scriptural primacy, possibly resulting in defensiveness on the part of the counselees.

Third, consideration may be given to how the Scriptures are employed in counseling. Donald Capps writes that the Bible has been used in counseling both in 'moral' and 'dynamic' ways. Capps offers Jay Adams as a proponent of the moral approach, citing Adams' example of a young couple that brings their seven year old son to a counselor for disciplinary problems. Adams' advice is that the pastor would draw upon such texts as Proverbs 22:15: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." Capps contrasts this approach to the dynamic approach of Carroll Wise, who when faced with a young man worried about his job, finances, children and wife (and also resentment against his wife), would turn to texts addressing the man's anxiety, such as "Do not be anxious about your life" (Mt. 6:25). In Wise's approach, psychoanalytic insights are employed to determine a (non-moral) issue to be addressed in counseling.

In contrast to these two approaches, Capps offers a third approach, based on Paul Ricoeur's view that Bible texts are "world disclosive." Capps writes that for Ricoeur, biblical texts are not limited to what they are ostensibly about -- their topical references. Instead they disclose a world that transcends the immediate situation. Therefore, returning to Wise's example of the man who not only worried about his life, but had resentment toward his wife, Capps recommends a passage like the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32). Here, the resentment felt by the counselee may parallel the resentment felt by the elder brother, and according to Capps, the disclosive potential of the text comes in the father's words, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours."<sup>16</sup>

A criticism one might make of Capps' approach is that it is not clear that Capps' biblical hermeneutic considers the questions to which the Bible's appears to be addressing itself. Hans Gadamer has described biblical hermeneutics as a discourse with texts, analogous to the questioning and answering of a conversation. According to Gadamer, modern readers bring one set of questions to the text, which they aim to fuse with the questions which the text seeks to answer. It is in reaching a shared understanding of the subject matter of these two meanings horizons, which provides the common ground between the texts and our own inquiries.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Hunter, Rodney J., gen. ed. *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, assoc. eds. H. Newton Malony, Liston Mills and John Patton (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1990), s.v. "Bible, Pastoral Use and Interpretation of" by Donald Capps, pp. 82-85.

See also Paul Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus," *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, eds. C. E. Reagan and D. Stewart (1978), pp. 239-245, and Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *Social Research*, 38(1971), 529-562.

<sup>17</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 333-341, 258. Taken from Thomas Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 2-3.

Returning to Capps' apparent hermeneutic in the parable of the prodigal son, he writes that he hopes the counselee will be "challenged to come to himself (as the elder brother came to *himself*)..." and discover when (s)he hears the father's words that the younger brother's gain is not the elder brother's loss.<sup>18</sup> Capps' focus on the elder brother's self-reconciliation would appear to reflect in the text his own therapeutic interest in self-care. What is less obvious is the way he has joined his interpretation with the meanings horizon of the text. One interpretation of this parable is that it is about the family of God, i.e., that in the ministry of Jesus, prodigals find the free and generous love of the Father and that there is nothing in this to disturb those committed to living out the holiness of God.<sup>19</sup> In light of this understanding, for example, it would appear that a theological dimension is one which runs central to the text; however, it is not evident how Capps incorporates such a dimension into his own interpretation, nor how he justifies his own reading of the text.

Aside from this hermeneutical point, Capps' 'disclosive' approach would appear to be a useful one for chronic shame counseling for two reasons. First, because chronic shame sufferers may be given to exaggerated demands (see pp. 92ff), this approach would seem to avoid using Scripture in a way which might add to those demands. Second, in encountering words of Scripture which would appear to have the potential to have poignant meanings for counselees, counselees may find themselves in positions to encounter transforming grace, a primary goal of chronic shame counseling.

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<sup>18</sup>Capps, "Bible, Pastoral Use and Interpretation of" p. 85.

<sup>19</sup>John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 9:21-18:34*, vol. 35b, gen. eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), pp. 781,791.



An illustration of a text which might be used in chronic shame counseling may help. Based in large part on the findings in Chapter Three regarding interviewees' susceptibility to rejection, it may be that a significant part of interviewees' encountering transforming grace is knowing that they are loved. Recall that for Charlene, when her husband unintentionally hurt her, she had to reassure herself that he loved her and did not wish her was not married to her ("He loves me...Why would he want to marry me?"). Therefore for Charlene, a threat of love withdrawal appeared to be a primary part of her experience of rejection.

A parable which would appear to have disclosive power for Charlene, and other interviewees, is the parable of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21ff). Concerning the meanings horizon of the text, Nineham sees the crux of the passage's teaching in 10:27 ("For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible"), in that salvation for rich and poor alike is due to the "grace and unlimited power of God."<sup>20</sup> Jesus' suggestion to the rich young ruler that he lacks the one thing he apparently cannot do (sell his possessions; 10:22), along with Jesus' reference to the camel going through the eye of a needle (an impossibility) would appear to provide textual support for Nineham's interpretation that Jesus sought to show that humans simply cannot earn salvation on their own merits, however substantial their efforts may be.

Capps writes that the disclosive power of a text in counseling begins with the *similarities* between the character in the biblical text and the counselee. In this case, the rich young ruler attests to having kept the commandments ("Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal...." 10:19). The similarity between the rich

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<sup>20</sup>D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1963), p. 272.

young ruler and Charlene, for example, might be that she lives by a list of demands regarding her role as a woman which she may find parallels the religious demands which the rich young ruler sought to fulfill.

Interestingly, a parallel account of the same parable (in Mt. 19:21) records that to the ruler's contention that he had kept the commandments, Jesus responded, "*If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions....*" (italics mine). In the context of the apparent overall teaching of the parable that people can not earn their way into heaven, one would expect that Jesus did not mean to advocate that the rich young ruler seek perfection; rather Jesus appeared to charge rich young ruler to do something he was unable to do, in order for Jesus to make his point about salvation only by grace. In counseling Charlene, this text could be referenced, raising a question about the extent to which in trying to be a "*wonderful lover, be the all and all at church volunteering....*" Charlene also was seeking an impossible standard of perfection.

Capps goes on to suggest that once resonances with the similarities have been made, then, it is in the *dissimilarity* between the Bible's and counselees' worlds that the disclosive potential of the passage lies. In this parable that potential would appear to lie in the phrase immediately following the rich young ruler's claim that he has kept the commandments, "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (10:21). In the midst of a person's concerted efforts to be found accepted by God (whether they be efforts of the rich young ruler, or of Charlene), Mark interjects Jesus' apparently unconditional acceptance of the person. The disjunction in the moment is striking, striking enough possibly for Charlene also to encounter the "new world" of the passage, as Capps puts it, of unconditional divine love.

This text may not be appropriate for all counselees, especially given psychological transferences which may be made by counselees with Jesus, the main figure in the text. For example, Jean might find barriers to receiving love from Jesus if she likened Jesus to her father, whom she has experienced as shaming throughout life. However, such a transference also might be an opportunity to address these issues in counseling, by naming and confronting the transference.

The parable of the rich young ruler is but one text which might be used as a 'world disclosive' passage in chronic shame counseling. For example, another account emphasizing the movements of God's grace in the lives of people is the account of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). In this passage, Jesus' words of acceptance toward Mary, who felt no need to busy herself serving Jesus with food preparation (but simply sat at his feet), may have disclosive potential.

It should be said that approaching the Bible in narrative fashion would not appear to be the primary way the Bible is used in the tradition of Fringes Presbyterian Church. David Kelsey, in surveying various ways the Bible's authority has been construed over the years, cites Benjamin Warfield as a leading proponent of those who view the Bible as propositional truth.<sup>21</sup> Because Warfield was a forerunner to beliefs and practices now found at Fringes Presbyterian Church (i.e., the P.C.A. denomination), there is reason to believe that seeing the Bible as propositional truth has deep roots in the tradition of five of the interviewees. Nevertheless, parishioners in the P.C.A. may not be entirely self-conscious about their own propositional tradition, and in any event, there is no

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<sup>21</sup>David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1975), pp. 2-11, 17-25.

reason to suspect they would not be open to a narrative approach.

## 2. Counseling Dialogue and Prayer

One of the findings discussed in Chapter Four was interviewees' apparent attention to their verbal expression as a way to maintain a certain view of identity (see pp. 170ff). Recall that Jean was concerned to "say it right" to her boss, which meant efficient language, resulting in "not wasting his time" (Charlene used the same language to express apparently a similar concern). Also, Matt came back to me the day after the interview to express his concern about his poor sentence construction during the interview. Finally, a concern that identity may have been found wanting, by virtue of words, seemed to be reflected in Sylvia's shame for her sermon. Recall also that we went on to discuss these findings according to their emphasis on performativity (including efficiency) which Lyotard has linked to a growing prevalence of technological knowledge.

This concern for words would appear to have a direct bearing on how pastoral counseling with chronic shame should be conducted. Dialogue is not central to all secular therapies, especially non-directive approaches. Albert Ellis, for example, writes of psychoanalytic sessions where nearly the entire session was spent in silence.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, pastoral presence has been seen to be crucially significant to pastoral as well as secular therapies. However, it is difficult to locate a time when dialogue was not important to pastoral counseling, especially given counseling's historical tradition as a directive practice.

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<sup>22</sup>Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1962), p. 5.

The nature of counseling dialogue, however, has been met with widely varying opinions among pastoral counselors. Eduard Thurneysen, for example, writes, "Pastoral care is and remains proclamation of the Word to the individual and neither can nor should ever be anything else."<sup>23</sup> While Thurneysen's exclusive focus on proclamation would seem to be an extreme position in a modern counseling environment, his focus points to an emphasis in counseling dialogue which would appear to be shared in varying degrees by other Christian counselors.

By contrast, Joachim Scharfenberg has suggested an approach focused on freedom in counseling dialogue. Scharfenberg has criticized Thurneysen's approach for causing pastoral dialogue to be simply a liturgical ritual, which inhibits the "living flow of dialogue" by directing it onto a prescribed track.<sup>24</sup> For Scharfenberg, pastoral dialogue should aim to produce the following:

Verbal interchange between two or more persons means foregoing exactness in the mathematical sense, objectivity in the epistemological sense, and information in the authoritarian sense. Through its basic circular structure, dialogue can hand a person his freedom and place at his disposal an opportunity to practice this freedom.<sup>25</sup>

Just as Thurneysen's approach could be criticized for being too prescriptive, it would appear that Scharfenberg's approach could be criticized for failing to recognize the meanings and import that religious words alone may be able to provide. Nevertheless, the issue to which Scharfenberg calls attention, i.e., freedom in language, would appear to be an important issue in counseling people suffering from chronic shame.

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<sup>23</sup>Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, trans. J. A. Worthington and Thomas Wieser (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press), p. 201

<sup>24</sup>Joachim Scharfenberg, *Pastoral Care As Dialogue*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

Again, an overall aim of chronic shame counseling is to provide counselees with safe counseling environments in which they can risk easing a strict allegiance to certain views of identity or in this case, the way those views of identity are expressed (i.e., words). Additionally, the aim is to point counselees to the deeper reality of their acceptance in Jesus Christ, regardless of their adherence to religious jargon (Matt) or their succinctness of expression (Jean).

It may be that in being aware of this potential issue in chronic shame counseling, that Christian counselors can model verbal expression which allows slightly more freedom with language in certain areas than counselees appear to be allowing themselves. Second, it may be that counselors and counselees can openly discuss issues of freedom in language. Third, counselors may want to be particularly sensitive to their responses to interviewees' words. Because of chronic shame counselees' possible sensitivities in these areas, they may interpret counselors' verbal and non-verbal cues as impatience, disrespect, or disinterest, when counselors had no intention of communicating such messages. Again, encouraging open communication about such misunderstandings may help.

One type of verbal expression which deserves special mention is Christian prayer. Not only is prayer a form of verbal expression, but it is a form of Christian practice. For two potential reasons, therefore, counselees may feel they must attend to prayer and expression in prayer as a strategy against shame. Recall, for example, Charlene's comments, "I do not pray as often as I should, or as often as I even would like to." Here, Charlene's apologetic tone, hinted that she may have felt she had failed some demand regarding prayer (see pp. 157-158). Also, recall that Matt's nineteen mentions of prayer during our



interview was part of the evidence to suggest that he also feared appearing 'uncommitted' in relation to prayer.

It must be said that this is not the only way prayer functioned for interviewees in relation to chronic shame. For example, Fran's comment, "When I pray, I talk to God.... There's no guardedness in my heart with God" indicated that prayer may have provided a safe place of protection from the pain of shame (in a relationship of growing grace). It may be that prayer can function as a preventive strategy against shame (and therefore a potential cause of shame), and also as a place to find relief from shame, possibly in the same person's life.

Private prayer would appear to be a characteristic feature of conservative church practice. One way this is evident is the stress placed on daily devotional times, understood in conservative church tradition as daily Bible reading and prayer. Consequently, there is reason to think that for the conservative Christian, God is related to and known not only through the Bible, but through private prayer. Therefore, prayer is likely to be an important pastoral resource for Christian counselors.

However, it should be said that prayer has been practiced in a particular way in conservative church tradition. Donald Bloesch writes the following about the "life of prayer" for the evangelical Christian:

True prayer is not only resignation and submission but striving with God, pleading with God, seeking to change the ways of God with his people so that his ultimate will might be more surely or fully accomplished. God's ultimate purposes are unchangeable, but his immediate will is flexible and open to change through the prayers of his children.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978 - vol. 1, 1979 - vol. 2), II, 57.

At least two features of prayer come through in Bloesch's description. First, Bloesch describes evangelical prayer in terms of "striving." Second, he reveals the theological presupposition underlying that effort, namely that God's "immediate will is flexible" and subject to change according to the prayers of his people. In short, prayer changes God's actions in the world.

Bloesch probably exaggerates the degree to which evangelical prayer is characterized by sheer effort. Moreover, Bloesch describes only one of two poles with respect to theologies of prayer. Other people have argued that prayer changes people, not God, and varying degrees of this view also are likely to be found among conservative Reformed Christians' views of prayer.<sup>27</sup> However, in broad terms, Bloesch's description probably highlights an emphasis that is found in evangelical prayer.

One possible implication of Bloesch's presupposition is that a Christian who believes prayer changes God's mind might easily come to believe that remaining in the realm of God's grace and blessings depends on one's continued prayers. This danger would appear to be greater for people who tend to experience exaggerated demands, as appeared to

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<sup>27</sup>This view of prayer is described by Howard Rice, who claims to speak for Calvin and the Reformed tradition in writing:

Because prayer deepens faith, it changes our attitude from that of doubt or indifference toward God to one of hopefulness and expectation. To pray is to discover that God answers prayer in many different ways.... Calvin's reasons for prayer can assist us to see prayer as relationship with God more than as pleading for what we want. His theology of prayer is God-centered and more concerned about how we may be shaped into the people God wills us to be than with how we may change God to fulfill our desires.

While Rice may or may not accurately represent Calvin's view of prayer and that of the Reformed tradition, his writing would nevertheless seem to describe an alternative view of prayer to that described by Bloesch.  
Rice, pp. 79-80.

be the case for interviewees who were chronic shame sufferers

As in the use of Scripture, therefore, Christian counselors would want to proceed with caution in the use of prayer, if they are to provide counseling settings in which counselees might encounter transforming grace. Prayer is not to be avoided. After all, it may likely be a primary means for conservative Reformed Christians to encounter God's presence. However, there may be a few considerations to keep in mind for prayer in the context of chronic shame counseling.

In keeping with the overall counseling aim with chronic shame of providing environments where demands are eased and transforming grace can be encountered, prayer might be aimed at being short, and focused on the love of God. Toward these ends, the writings from Anglican and Catholic spirituality prove to be a useful resource. In his book *True Prayer*, Ken Leech writes that many people:

...see prayer merely as asking God for things, pleading with a remote Being about the needs and crises of earth.... So prayer is seen in essentially functional terms -- is it effective or not? does it produce results? It is hardly surprising that we see prayer in this way since we live within a social order which is geared to the notion of efficiency and production as the supreme end of existence. But in order to pray well we need to disengage ourselves from this way of thinking.<sup>28</sup>

Leech's mention of the larger social impact of "efficiency and production" on peoples' modes of prayer would appear to speak to some of the same issues already indicated in interviewees' testimony. Leech goes on to write that in place of "functional" prayer characterized by much doing before God, prayer in the spirituality tradition is characterized simply by being with God. Leech continues:

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<sup>28</sup>Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (London: Sheldon Press, 1980), pp. 6-7.

So we have come to the point at which, through discipline and silent waiting, prayer happens. We do not create prayer, but merely prepare the ground and clear away obstacles. Prayer is always a gift, a grace, the flame which ignites the wood; the Holy Spirit gives prayer. The human response is one of adoring love.<sup>29</sup>

One appeal of Leech's approach is the apparent absence of demands on the person's part to "create prayer." Rather, it would appear that all that is demanded of the person is to be still before God, removing obstacles to prayer. For Leech, the action is on God's side, a presupposition which appears to be at the heart of spirituality. In defining the tradition, Leech writes:

First, Christian spirituality is a process in which Christ takes the initiative. It is a putting on of Christ (Gal. 3.27), a solidarity in Christ, a sharing in his dying and rising. It is a process which the Incarnation began, and which continues, a process which the Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov calls 'Christification'. It is therefore a work of grace from start to finish.<sup>30</sup>

Leech's emphasis on prayer being "a work of grace from start to finish" is the primary reason such prayer would appear to be compatible with the overall aim of chronic shame counseling of encounters with grace. Again, prayer of this type may be unfamiliar to conservative Reformed Christians, counselor and counselee alike. For this reason, some experimentation with this type of prayer might be appropriate at the start. This might be done together during the counseling session. Then counselees might try this form of prayer on their own, reporting back to the counselor on how it went. In this way, prayer, just as other resources in counseling, may be employed in a way to enhance the likelihood that counselees may have encounters with grace.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

### 3. Trusting God

In Chapter Two, we stated that an underlying presupposition of this thesis is that pastoral counseling is a triologue of three persons: the counselee, the counselor and God. With respect to this presupposition, there was reason to believe that interviewees' chronic shame negatively shaped their view of God and impeded trust in God. For example, Fran admitted, "It was always kind of difficult with God because every time he gave me something it hurt like hell." Fran went on to say that the backdrop for her experience was the "human authorities" who had brought her much pain (see p. 153). Additionally, Charlene admitted had a related feeling: "And one of the main things that keeps me from praying is that God's too busy to listen to me." Charlene went on to explain that it was her feeling of "not measuring up" that caused her to feel this way (see p. 158).

Fran and Charlene's testimony would suggest that their experiences with other people, particularly where shame was involved, shaped their experiences with God. For Fran, human authorities brought pain; therefore, God did also. Similarly, Charlene appeared to feel inadequate before people, and likewise she appeared to feel inadequate before God. Noting the impact that human relationships have on one's relationship with God is not new. In a chapter called "Coming to Terms with Providence," Paul Pruyser concluded this about a former psychiatric patient, "All the fierce ambivalences toward parents and siblings and her own self were reenacted toward the members of the Christian Trinity symbol, toward the church, toward clergymen, and toward members of congregations she was exposed to."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Paul W. Pruyser, *Between Belief and Unbelief* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 158.

Peoples' experiences with other people, therefore, would appear to be one primary contributing factor to their experience of God. However, especially given that human relationships can not be managed as one might wish, one wonders if there are resources to which people can turn to positively influence their experiences of God.

One possibility is the resources from one's church tradition. As described in Chapter Four, the Reformed tradition has long emphasized the providence of God. But whether or not, and how, one's tradition serves as a resource to trust God is a difficult issue. For Pruyser's part, he is skeptical:

There is a considerable difference between the production and revisions of doctrinal statements and the feelingful beliefs of the man in the street. Theology is responsible and knowledgeable inquiry; religious belief is closer to the primary process of wishful and need-determined gropings for help in a precarious situation.<sup>32</sup>

In place of a tradition-based approach for growing in trust, Pruyser suggests an experience-based approach, based centrally on entering the world of caring. He writes:

From the experience of the self as caring and cared-for object, as well as the other as caring and cared-for object, stem our cognitive gropings about the rest of reality, our metaphysical speculations, our creative imaginations, our leading thought, and our religious ideas.... Help from others, help from a god, help from a heavenly Father -- it does not matter too much how you phrase it, for in the end, the care received from other human beings is seen as mediated care whose fountain is in a cosmic more. There is no magic in that thought.<sup>33</sup>

For Pruyser, providence is clarified in human caring. However, Pruyser's experience-based approach may not be the only way. Recall Fran's testimony about how she finally began to trust God:

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 180-181.



I understood that in the wisdom of God, that God's actions are fully guided by his wisdom and his love and then, then it was shortly after -- *Knowing God, Knowing God* [a book by J. I. Packer]. That was the chapter in *Knowing God* that I had read. And then shortly after that, it was his own revelation to me, personally, in my heart....

Fran's testimony would appear to be a reminder that grace, including grace to trust, may be encountered not just through human caring, but through religious literature, or God's movement in a human heart. There is some reason to suspect, therefore, that doctrinal resources from the Reformed tradition, such as those on providence discussed in Chapter Four, could be useful for Fran or others suffering from chronic shame.

Fran went on to suggest the degree to which her experience of God had apparently changed:

It's only God that can provide the needs for the unraveling. I'm also thankful to God; I've seen more and more of his mercy and his kindness towards me because he has chosen so carefully what to reveal at whatever time it has been, and it has not been all at once.

Given her emphasis on God's direct action in her life, it may be that a counselor would want to help alert Fran to the ways that God's mediates grace through other people, in community. An important part of this experience might be Christian counselors' ability to provide in counseling a relationship for counselees in which counselees are unconditionally loved and therefore can begin to risk trusting counselors.

Nevertheless, it would appear to be by a variety of means, including not only other people, but Scripture and other Christian literature, and possibly even doctrines of a church, that people may find resources for growing in trust for God.

#### 4. The Counselor's Priestly Presence

We turn now to pastoral identity for a Christian counseling model for chronic shame, as it relates to encounters with grace. Some people may find it curious that pastoral identity is left for last. However, the aim in this chapter is to begin with the issues to which the empirical findings appeared to point, suggesting how these findings then lead up to an identity along the lines of the one presented here.

Ben Campbell Johnson, writing in *Pastoral Spirituality*, describes one of three roles of the minister to be that of a "Christ-bearer." For Johnson, the minister as Christ-bearer is embodied in symbol. A symbol has a sensuous character, in that it can be seen and described, touched, felt and sometimes tasted. However, above all, a symbol points to something beyond itself, in a way that mere words cannot capture. The minister as symbol points beyond his/herself to Jesus Christ, and the way this is captured is through the minister's presence, more than anything (s)he says or does.

For Johnson, the minister as Christ-bearer is biblically grounded in a theology of the incarnation. He suggests that the gospel of John presents incarnation as the way of redemption. For example, it was the divine Logos through whom all things were created (1:3) and the same Jesus through whom salvation was offered ("I am the way, and the truth and the life" 14:6). Johnson goes on to argue that the apostle Paul saw the Church as incarnational, stemming from the crucifixion and resurrection. This is evidenced in Paul's "in Christ" theology, where the life Christ lived in the flesh has been reincarnated in his body, the Church (I Cor. 12:13), and where Christians are to "put on

Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Likewise, pastors are to have the "aroma of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14-17).<sup>34</sup>

Johnson's model is appealing for chronic shame counseling for two main reasons. First, his focus on symbolic presence takes the emphasis off anything counselors can explicitly do for counselees in terms of imparting transformation by grace. Rather, this focus appears to be compatible with the focus of providing an environment conducive to encountering grace. Second, Johnson's focus on the incarnation would appear to be one conducive to helping people toward encounter with the living Jesus Christ.

One possible danger in Johnson's focus on pastor as Christ-bearer would appear to be that pastors could become the object of counselees' devotion, confusing the symbol for that which it represents. Johnson acknowledges this concern, and provides for it mainly in terms of his emphasis on symbol as a 'go between' (only).<sup>35</sup> However, this danger may need to be underscored in pastoral counseling, given the transferences, and counter-transferences, which will likely occur between counselee and counselor anyway, usually involving some form of idealization.

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<sup>34</sup>Johnson, pp. 80-90.

It might also be helpful to expand Johnson's biblical underpinnings for his Christ-bearer role for the pastor to that of the Old Testament, namely the tradition of priests (and Levites), a forerunner to the priestly office of Jesus Christ. Although priests are pictured throughout Old Testament history in varying roles and circumstances, they were primarily keepers of the sacred religion for Israel. For example, in Numbers they are the ones assigned to dismantle and erect the tabernacle (1:47-54), and they alone were allowed to touch its furnishings (3:29-32). In Deuteronomy, we find the priests assigned to guard the book of the law (17:18) and assist Moses in the ceremony of covenant renewal (27:9). It may be helpful for pastors to think of themselves as a type of midwife, helping to usher counselees toward the sacred.

<sup>35</sup>Johnson, p. 83.

Furthermore, a priestly presence may be one which does not come naturally for Reformed pastors. The Catholic tradition has emphasized the priesthood of the pastor, but this emphasis was lost from the Protestant tradition, as a result of the Reformation emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, which taught a corporate priesthood, comprised of all Christians. Howard Rice confirms this view among Reformed pastors, in particular, writing, "Many pastors have been wary of anything that suggests that they have status as mediators between God and the people." Rice goes on to point out that although pastors have avoided the role, parishioners greatly need pastors in a priestly role in matters of forgiveness.<sup>36</sup>

However, while recognizing possible barriers to its application, it would nevertheless seem useful to suggest a priestly pastoral identity as one which appears to be compatible with the aim that counselees encounter transforming grace in chronic shame counseling.

To sum up, based on empirical findings relating to interviewees' peculiar struggles with demands, and with rejection, we offered as a primary aim of chronic shame counseling that of encounters with grace. We went on to consider how this aim might be applied to the use of particular resources, namely Scripture, and counseling dialogue and prayer. Moreover, we considered possible ways to overcome counselees barriers to trusting God, which were erected by chronic shame. Finally, we suggested that one pastoral identity which would appear to further the ends of encounters with transforming grace as a goal in counseling would be the counselors' priestly presence.

In the next section of this chapter we turn to a second focus for chronic shame counseling. This focus is on a counselor's role as a voice of truth, particularly with

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<sup>36</sup>Rice, p. 127.

respect to issues of unreality and reality emerging in interviewees' testimony.

## **B. Voices of Truth**

The preceding section focused on issues involved in creating counseling settings where counselees might encounter transforming grace. This pastoral aim serves as the major focus for a Christian counseling model for chronic shame. However, interviewees' testimonies pointed to other issues which bear upon the counseling process.

One such issue relates to ways that the counseling process might help interviewees address distortion and uncertainty in their chronic shame, in two respects. First, because explicit notions of sin are characteristically found in Christian counseling, and because related notions appeared in interviewees' testimony about shame, we consider the place of sin in chronic shame counseling. Second, we consider interviewees' strategies for reducing distortion and uncertainty in shame, and its application for counseling.

While the common theme running throughout both of the following discussions relates to reality and unreality, especially because of the inclusion of notions of "sin" in this discussion, preference is given to an overall title of voices of *truth*. However, the nonreligious notion of reality remains central to the discussion.

### **1. Dealing with Wrongness and Sin**

As discussed in Chapter Three, a self-perception interviewees appeared to have in chronic shame was that of being "wrong." Recall one of Fran's discussions about being "wrong":

Well, does that mean that any form of relaxation is wrong? Any form of that kind of thing? That's what I mean. And if it's relaxing for me to go out and get stencils to stencil my bathroom, I mean is that wrong? There are guidelines for right and wrong, and yet I come back to the things I know I *must* do.

Taken at face value, Fran's comments about being "wrong" would appear to convey no religious meaning. However, elsewhere, Fran cited "slothfulness" as that which she understood to be sin, providing a context within which to see that her above example about doing something relaxing, may for Fran relate to sin.

Moreover, it did appear from Fran's testimony that not only was her shame-based identity reflected in self-perceptions such as "I am nothing" but that she resonated readily with notions of sin from her counselor's sermon in church one Sunday (see pp. 190-191). For a person who understands her life in highly religious terms, one would suspect that Fran's shame feelings of being "wrong" and "nothing," overlap with her sin notions. Finally, there is some reason to believe that Fran's self-perceptions of sin and wrongness are ones which she resists relinquishing. Recall Fran's description of discovering she had an "incredible" singing voice: "'Oh my gosh! That's myself!' and I would burst into tears.... It was horrible."

Therefore there would appear to be reason to suspect that chronic shame sufferers may be apt to have self-perceptions of wrongness in shame, which to the extent they see themselves as religious people, may inform their experiences of sin. For this reason, Christian counselors may want to be wary about doing anything to add to a counselees' sense of sin and wrongness. It should be pointed out that broadly speaking, "sin" is not popular language today within or without pastoral counseling. In Chapter Four, we noted Karl Menninger's argument that notions of sin began disappearing in the West around the



turn of this century. Alastair Campbell has observed this same trend in counseling, writing that today,

...the identification of specific offences and the procedures of accusation, trial before the Session and public denunciation inevitably encourage a legalistic and simplistic view of sin. Such practices obscure the subtleties of human behavior and allow people the easy comfort of apportioning blame to certain types of action for the sense of human failure in which we should all participate.<sup>37</sup>

For Campbell, therefore, it is apparently our growing understanding of the complexity of sin which results in its being problematic in counseling today.

However, while likely having been affected by broader trends moving away from sin, there is reason to believe that some Christian counselors retain a notion of sin as central to counseling. Christian counselor Larry Crabb, for example, writes, "An appreciation of the reality of sin is a critically necessary beginning point for a Christian view of anything." When it comes to the counseling session itself, Crabb argues that the focus is a person's deepest needs (feeling worthwhile, through attaining significance and security), although a notion of sin also serves explicitly to mark the boundaries of one's freedom.<sup>38</sup>

In a counseling tradition in which sin has occupied an explicit place, when it comes to counseling with suspected chronic shame issues, then some guidance would appear to be needed. A return to interviewee texts may help. First,

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<sup>37</sup>Alastair Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>38</sup>Larry Crabb, *Basic Principles of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), pp. 48, 54-61, 65-75.

Perhaps one of the more confrontive approaches to sin in counseling is offered by Jay Adams. For Adams, "man's basic problem" is sin, and counseling involves a "nouthetic" approach focused on confronting sin.

Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), pp. 128ff.

recall that after failing to visit the dying parishioner, pastor Sylvia went "groveling" to her therapist, apparently engulfed in shame. We pick up Sylvia's account:

...And she died basically without a pastor. Well, you know, that was wrong. I failed her. I was groveling before my therapist telling him about this, just weeping, and he said, "(perky voice) Well, yeah, it sounds like you did let her down, but you know what I do with that? I just decide that I'm going to try real hard to never do that again." (we both laugh, Sylvia particularly) It's so clean! Yeah, it just dissipated. It's like, "Well, okay, that's good." (Sylvia continues to laugh heartily).

Sylvia offers this example apparently as one in which the therapist's technique was helpful in dealing with her failing. In particular, it would appear that her therapist's words had the effect of *reducing* her wrong, making it sound as if she had done something routine, like fail to put the rubbish out on collection day.

It would appear that the therapist focused on Sylvia's distortion, a suggestion of the potential pastoral usefulness of the description of distortion in chronic shame provided in Chapter Three. In fact, this incident may provide a pointer for the handling of guilt issues in chronic shame counseling, namely that the counselor may want to think of him/herself in the role of *reducing* parishioners' sense of sin, instead of *reminding* parishioners of sin (which would appear to be the approach of Crabb and others, regardless of whether the approach is confrontive or gentle).<sup>39</sup>

There is a second type of shame experience which may inform the handling of sin in chronic shame counseling. Recall that when a colleague of Barbara's with whom she had a

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<sup>39</sup>It is worth mentioning that had the therapist dismissed Sylvia's sense of failure as entirely unwarranted, his stance may have alienated himself from Sylvia with respect to her guilt. That is, one suspects had her counselor dismissed her guilt, then Sylvia may have distrusted his intervention.

difficult relationship failed to say hello in passing, Barbara responded this way:

...what did I do wrong? What's so bad about me that this person would not say 'hi' back to me? So, I... go through the whole day just thinking, "Oh God!" And then you fall into depression.

As with Fran, when taken at face value, Barbara's sense of feeling "wrong" would appear to suggest no religious connotations whatsoever. However, to the extent that Barbara, or other chronic shame sufferers, identify with conservative church communities, then notions of sin may be included in their experiences of shame.

More to the point, the above example was suggested to be one in which Barbara implicated herself based on another person's actions for which she had no responsibility (and over which she had no control). Jean provided two illustrations in which she, apparently unknowingly, appeared to arrive at the same conclusion about her culpability. Therefore, there is reason to think that in addition to being in the role of *reducing* senses of sin for chronic shame sufferers, Christian counselors may find themselves in the role of *clarifying* issues regarding shame experiences where a person may have felt oneself was implicated when there would appear to be little causes to see real guilt involved.

Having considered instances appearing to call for a pastoral response of reducing the wrong, and those suggesting clarifying the wrong, we now turn to a third issue raised by interviewees, within this general category of wrongness and sin. Recall from Chapter Five that Fran apparently found it helpful to name the identities which she used as preventive strategies against shame "dysfunctional idols" (see pp. 198-200). There was reason to suspect that this theological language of sin from her Reformed tradition helped her to come to the point of

seeing not only that these identities were destroying her and alienating her from true identity, but that God said to her, "Go ahead and let this [identity] go."

There is some reason to suspect that "dysfunctional idols" were not operating in Fran's life in a way so as to add to her sense of sin or her shame-based sense of inadequacy. This was indicated by the way idols appeared not to reflect on Fran's own identity. Recall one of Fran's descriptions of idols:

*It's [i.e., the idol is] actually destroying you.... In other words, they cause you to have to weigh every minute of your day, every decision you make, everything you put on your -- these things, whatever they are.... (italics mine)*

When Fran spoke of dysfunctional idols, she spoke of them as if they were entirely apart from herself, even though these idols were her own views of identity she sought to maintain. Even though idolatry refers to sin, the image did not appear to have the self-reference for Fran as did her description of her "slothfulness," for example, or her feeling "I am nothing." Fran's references to "it," "they," and "these things" made it sound as if the idols were a named outside enemy against which she could focus her efforts to change her unhelpful preventive strategies against shame.

It may be that for many people, because in its Old Testament use, idolatry related to external objects of wood and stone, that in its modern use, idolatry tends to relate to some external object. While counselors would want to proceed cautiously with introducing such terms as idolatry into chronic shame counseling, it may be that particularly for people like Fran who see their lives in terms of a great deal of religious imagery and language anyway, that introducing such a terms would prove useful in helping interviewees let go of these preventive identities.

## 2. Strategies for 'Checking' Reality

The two causes of shame discussed in Chapter Three were failure and rejection. In relation to those causes, this research found that interviewees experienced shame for failing expectations they appeared to think they had exaggerated in their own minds. Additionally, interviewees felt shame for rejection they apparently were not certain even occurred (see pp. 114ff). Not surprisingly, when it came to responses to shame, interviewees sometimes looked to find objective gauges on reality, in order to reduce the distortion and uncertainty.

One gauge demonstrated by Charlene, Sylvia and Barbara was self-talk. Recall that when Charlene felt rejected by her husband, she recalled saying to herself:

He loves me. Why would he marry me? Why would he want to stay married to me? Why would he want to spend his life with me -- just to hurt me all the time? I know for a fact that's not him.

Charlene's own self-directed response appeared to be based on the presupposition that her feelings could be reversed if she could produce new thoughts which countered the old thoughts driving the unwanted feelings.

Such a principle is not unlike that around which Albert Ellis has built his theory of Rational-Emotive Therapy. For Ellis, problems start with activating experiences, or events (A), which are interpreted by beliefs (B), leading to certain emotional consequences (C). The goal in therapy, therefore, is a disputation of irrational beliefs (D), replacing them with beliefs "more closely rooted to information and to reason."<sup>40</sup> Ellis himself claims "excellent" results with his methods over substantially

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<sup>40</sup>Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1962), pp. 35-59, 89-109.

shorter periods of therapy, as compared with old psychoanalytic methods.<sup>41</sup>

There is no reason to believe that neither Charlene nor other interviewees self-consciously sought to employ techniques of Rational Emotive Therapy. However, the basic principles between the therapeutic theory and interviewees approaches would appear to be similar. Moreover, Charlene may have met with some success through this method. When asked whether or not her strategy helped, Charlene replied, "(15 second pause) I'm getting better. I'm working on it."

However, Charlene's success with the approach may have been greater than that of Jean. Recall that when Jean suspected she had been snubbed by her boss at the social gathering, she responded:

So, I just thought, "Oh, Jean, don't get paranoid." I kept thinking, "I *am* getting paranoid about this... so again, I thought (*in rapid fire sentences*), "I must have done something wrong. What'd I do? What's wrong with me? I'm not good enough! I'm not," you know, all that kind of stuff.

The onrushing wave of emotions apparent in Jean's movement from her starting point of "Oh Jean, don't get paranoid" to her later sentiment of "I'm not good enough!" would suggest that Jean's attempt at rational counter-attack was not effective. The reason for the ineffectiveness of her strategy may be that Jean did not mount a sustained rational counterattack. Compared with Charlene's series of statements and questions to herself, Jean's one phrase, "don't get paranoid" appeared to be a weak application of the method.

Rational-emotive methods have been accepted and used by a number of Christian counselors. Included among these is

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9, 32-33.



one Christian counselor who has applied the method to issues of chronic shame. Recall from Chapter One that Jeff VanVonderen's theory for overturning shame is based on acquiring proper beliefs, namely that as a new creation in Christ people are entirely of redeemed substance. Therefore, a shame-based person can know that any thoughts or feelings of inadequacy are based in falsehood.<sup>42</sup>

However, the nature of chronic shame would appear to suggest that rational-emotive means could bring only temporary relief from chronic shame. For example, Helen Lewis has noted the phenomenon of stimulus generalization in chronic shame, where one shame experience leads to shame felt for all succeeding events in a person's life, resulting in consuming shame.<sup>43</sup> Such overwhelming feelings are unlikely to be overturned in a full or lasting way simply through rational means. Moreover, concerning a Christian critique, Jones and Butman have argued that Ellis overestimates rationalism, to the neglect of other ways human beings "image" God.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Albert Ellis himself was an atheist, and the values underlying illustrations he provides would appear to contradict orthodox Christian assumptions such as the existence of sin.

However, interviewees did appear to experience some help through rational-emotive means of self-talk. Therefore, it would appear to be a useful technique which a Christian counselor might teach a counselee to employ as a short-term means of help. In particular, a counselor may want to help a counselee develop a system of rational thoughts which

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<sup>42</sup>Jeff VanVonderen, *Tired of Trying to Measure Up: Getting Free From the Demands, Expectations and Intimidations of Well-Meaning People* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), p. 129.  
See also Crabb, pp. 43-47.

<sup>43</sup>Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), p. 36.

<sup>44</sup>S. L. Jones and R. E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies* (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press), 1991, pp. 179-185.

would appear to address types of distortions and uncertainties which (s)he seems to encounter.

For example, for Jean, a counselor might have queried, "How was it that the boss rejected you?" "Did he pass up anyone else in the room that afternoon?" "Do you think he was rejecting them too?" Such an approach, aimed at identifying real signs of rejection (of which there probably were none), may have helped eliminate the uncertainty surrounding acceptance/rejection.<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, the counseling session itself can be one in which the counselor can model a process of bringing corrective thoughts to bear on counselees' issues. Thirdly, counselees might be directed to Charlene, for example, may have benefitted from her husband as a gauge on reality for her, evidenced when she remarked, "Sure, Charlene thought everything was supposed to be perfect all the time, and I'm like this is not real life."

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we sought to use the empirical findings to reconsider and advance pastoral-theological responses to shame. This was approached in two ways.

First, we examined ways that the findings informed existing models of care and counseling, and the church. Regarding counseling, we noted that the findings provide a schema of causes, preventive strategies and consequences of chronic shame, within which counselee symptoms can be located. Also, the findings suggest ways that interviewees' church

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<sup>45</sup>Ellis himself recommends a confrontive approach, which would be inappropriate for shame counseling, given tenuous bonds of acceptance to which interviewees are given. Employing a confrontive approach could easily cause the interviewee to feel rejection and shame, resulting only in growing defenses, as barriers in the counselor-counselee relationship.

and theological contexts interacted with personality structures to create chronic shame. In response to Capps' model of self-trust, we sought to show some of the social dimensions of trust. Moreover, in response to Smedes' model of self-acceptance, we sought to show some of the complexities involved in interviewees' issues of acceptance. Regarding the church, we explored implications of the findings on motives for conservative Reformed piety.

Next, we considered issues emerging in interviewees' accounts within the context of a Christian counseling model for chronic shame. First, based on interviewees' recurrent experiences of failure and rejection as causes of chronic shame, we based the chief counseling aim on encounters with grace. We went on to consider several issues relative to interviewees' church contexts which appeared to be involved in creating their chronic shame, and would also typically be involved in a Christian counseling response. Namely, we considered ways interviewees' testimony informed the use of the Scriptures, and of counseling dialogue and prayer in chronic shame counseling. Also, we considered ways to overcome counselees' shame-related barriers to trusting God.

Second, based on interviewees' experiences of distortion and uncertainty, we considered ways counselors might serve as voices of truth for chronic shame counselees. In particular, we considered successful strategies counselees employed to find gauges on reality with respect to their causes of chronic shame. Moreover, we considered the way that distortion also may have influenced interviewees' experiences of sin, and we considered one counselee's use of notions of idolatry in her apparently successful strategy to achieve reconciliation to her identity.

This chapter considered pastoral responses to chronic shame. In the final section of this thesis, we turn to a concluding assessment for this research.

## Thesis Conclusion

This final section of the thesis aims to re-locate the main findings of the research in contemporary discussions on shame, and also to point toward possible areas for future research.

As stated several times in this thesis, in the last decade chronic shame has gained the attention of many psychoanalysts as a problem of growing proportions in the United States. Possibly because many present-day experiences of shame seem to be experienced primarily with reference to exposure before oneself, rather than other people, among social scientists, modern shame studies have been pursued primarily by psychoanalysts.

This thesis, however, sought to consider the peculiar roles both of social structures as well as psychic structures in creating chronic shame. Given a research aim of advancing pastoral theological perspectives on shame, we were particularly interested in the vital role played by church communities with respect to shame. Because a majority of interviewees who suffered from chronic shame were found in a conservative church setting, the research findings led us to a focus on the conservative Reformed tradition in creating, and providing resources for overturning, chronic shame.

Findings included the way interviewees' attempts to be holy and to be obedient to God, as well as their use of Scripture and of words in general, served both to sustain and to help overturn their chronic shame. The findings also suggested ways that chronic shame shaped interviewees' views of God. These findings are expected to be useful to pastoral caregivers, along with parishioners who are chronic shame sufferers, in understanding the array of

social as well as psychic factors apparently serving to create chronic shame.

Moreover, in employing a "grounded theory" qualitative research style, one which emphasizes relationships between various parts of a phenomenon, we were able to explore some of the relationships between component parts of chronic shame, providing a larger picture of causes, phenomenon, preventive strategies and consequences of shame. Within this larger picture of chronic shame, we also noted ways that preventive strategies against shame and consequences of shame can become fresh causes of shame resulting in an additional preventive strategy of withdrawal.

The findings of this research would appear to be useful in identifying issues relevant to counseling for chronic shame, particularly in a conservative Reformed setting. However, these findings would also seem to point toward additional areas for future research. First, future research will undoubtedly continue to focus on lasting cures for chronic shame. Such studies might target a research sample of people who testify to having found lasting relief from chronic shame. With regard to this relief, pastoral theologians may wish to particularly attend to how interviewees' experiences reflect their church traditions, possibly including the role of God, prayer and Scripture in their transformation from shame.

Second, it may be useful to take up a more thorough-going consideration of good shame. If theorists like Agnes Heller are correct that shame is innate and can only be shifted, not eliminated, then an understanding of possible positive contexts for shame may be a part of overturning chronic shame. Such research could be pursued either from the standpoint of biblical and theological studies, or from the standpoint of empirical enquiry. One potentially fruitful course may be to examine the role of shame as



remorse. There was some reason to suspect from interview testimony gathered in this research, but not involving chronic shame and therefore not analyzed in this thesis, that it is possible for shame to function as a peculiar remorse, where estrangements are revealed and reconciliation is prompted. Moreover, there was reason to suspect that shame remorse may be different from a guilt remorse which appeared to be experienced not so much in terms of social estrangement, as transgression of conscience. These and other issues may be useful avenues for considering a positive role for shame.

Third, there is undoubtedly work still left to be done in determining reasons why shame appears to have moved inward in American culture, experienced primarily with reference to one's self. This enquiry would appear to relate to sociological research, possibly in a broad-based investigation of the implications of declining shared social norms believed to characterize American society.

These are just a few of the areas which might produce fruitful study with respect to chronic shame. There are undoubtedly other areas, and to all of these, pastoral theologians will hopefully turn in the future in an effort to find solutions for the problem of chronic shame.

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